



CRAIK'S PARADISE

(LIFE IN ANDAMANS)

By

Prativadi Bhayankara Venkatacharya



1938

DEDICATED
TO
THE MARTYRS OF HUNGER-STRIKE

FROM

TO

JETIN DAS

HARIN MUNSHI

FOREWORD

Prativadi Bhayankarachari would not only not accept my plea to be let alone, and insist that I must go through his book however tired I might be and over-worked, but he wants a fore-word from me !

Well, I have gone through the manuscript and have decided to do, perhaps, the most unconventional thing ever done by a Prime Minister—write a preface for a prisoner's book. I do not know what has happened to me these days,—I enjoy the dullest conversation, but cannot read books, even the best of them. Yet I read this quaint production of Bhayankarachari at one stretch and fell in love with the grammar and the style of it and decided not to discourage the young man in his desire to print it. I hope it will be published just as it is written.

What is the thing that stands out most in these notes of an Ex-Andaman prisoner so far as I am concerned ? Let me confess it, it is the charming thoughts about his mother. It is a wonderful thing, this bond between mother and child. It is a secret of the atoms, nothing less.

Again it is most remarkable that Bhayankarachari had not murder enough in him to kill the bug which he had between his fingers on the first night in the Andaman cell. He preferred to throw it away alive to crushing it. Wonderful people, these terrorists, worth a whole psychology book.

MADRAS,
8th February, 1938.

C. RAJAGOPALACHARI.

INTRODUCTION

“Tell me frankly Mr. Bhayankaracharya, if it was not merely a matter of tactics to come out of the jail, that you wired to Gandhiji that you do not believe in Terrorism,” was the question put to me by one of the Press Correspondents in the Secretariat when I was introduced to him by a Parliamentary Secretary on the 19th of November.

When people do not and cannot observe the Political trend objectively and examine the incidents in an analytical manner, owing to the lack of the scientific outlook, and prepossessed by a subjective prejudice, fostered by malicious propaganda of an alien Press, to them it looks an enigma, an unsolvable proposition to believe a thing, which in its objective approach never formulates itself into a problem at all.

But what was problem to that correspondent is nevertheless—a doubt, a question—a query—to many of my countrymen—including most in the Congress fold.

We take a thing and without analysing it on all sides, we attribute a sort of mental prejudice to it, i.e., we read, or rather, we are given to reading the events in an isolated manner.

In so far as this much has been our habit, this doubt is but natural however much we may try to curb it off or soften it away.

When hundreds of my comrades are rotting still inside the jail, even after the genuine and frank declara-

tion of their position in matters of terrorism, that this question should have been put to me is what I consider the sneering irony of fate.

Too, much exhausted in that town, I ran away to the kindly Ashram of Totapalli Hills, where this challenge of the correspondent came again and again to the top of my worried mind.

I once again took my pen that in days of childhood indulged in effeminate lyrics of hysterical sentiments, to note down the untold miseries of the budding flowers of India's youth—crippled and crumpled, wasted in that heavenly soil of Sir Henry Craik's Paradise. These flowers happened to be 'Bakuls'—although wasted and crumpled—yet and for that very reason sent out their innate effervescence—freely, intensely and continuously.

But I intended to speak to my friends at large about their deplorable condition that mostly jeopardised their lives, that crippled their health and rendered them permanent invalids. If in touching the various sides and shapes of this deplorable life, I did not much care for the style and beauties of the language—well then, I stand charged and plead guilty.

In speaking so, I could not take a cheap propaganda outlook. I could not paint an exaggerated and gaudily coloured spectacle—knowing that there are always a set of people who are delicate and sensitive, who like to feel rather than to be told, and to them also I intend this production. In this effort, however, I am afraid I did not do full justice to that wretched life that sapped away the lives of many of my young comrades. Albeit my countrymen are requested to go through it fully so that

they may feel more than they would see at first, from the lines. I tried in that short stay of 9 days, of which 3 or 4 were spent in fever, to portray the life in the Andamans too closely, for which I selected myself, from whose view point this has been narrated. With this exception there is no meaning to that "I" occurring in that book. I means, invariably, every one of us. I consider myself a humble witness, a spectator moving in bewilderment in that flashing refulgence of martyrdom radiating from those suffering faces of my comrades.

I did my best, in so far as I have been helped by the Premier of Madras, to answer all the akin doubts that may arise like the one of the correspondents in the course of the 6th Chapter.

All the events are strictly carried and the conversations, if not verbatim to the word, are the same.

By laying open the condition of the Andamans, the main purpose is to suggest to the public and to the Government of India as well, that those souls that suffered so much, steeled and tempered in that school of experience, are not likely to take or speak lightly of their convictions and when they say they have no faith in terrorism they mean it seriously, sincerely and undoubtedly.

I shall feel more than gratified if the public sees eye to eye with me in this matter and create an atmosphere compelling the Government to release all our Political Martyrs rotting inside the jails.

PRATIVADI BHAYANKARA VENKATACHARYA.

CRAIK'S PARADISE

(LIFE IN ANDAMANS)

It is a hard and nice subject for a man to write of himself ; it grates his own heart to say anything of disparagement, and the reader's ears to hear anything of praise for him.

—Abraham Cowley.

CHAPTER I

It was at about 2-30 p.m. on the 11th January 1936 when first I was informed of my impending departure to the Andamans. I was kept in the European ward in the Penitentiary of Madras. Twelve days passed since I was brought from the Coimbatore Central Jail where I spent one and a half years of the worst privation of my Jail life. Why I was brought over here was only a matter for speculation, of doubt and uncertainty. Yet during my sojourn in Madras two European and two Indian Doctors along with Major Contractor examined me for about 30 minutes in the hospital in the most ceremonious manner. There were vague hints, irregular suggestions and sundry proofs that I might be removed very soon. "Why? When? and Where?" were the questions that haunted me much and perplexed my brains. There was a vague joy and fear that I might

after all be removed to the Andamans. Not that the reluctant Judge has passed upon me a sentence of 14 years of transportation, (considering my youth) not that the Public Prosecutor was considerate enough to see the case to the possible extent of the legal heights, and saw 7 years was my minimum term; not that Coimbatore was the place specially selected by the Government for my stay pending the appeal in the High Court, (perhaps respecting the law that a prisoner may not be removed from the local jail till the decision of the High Court!)—the place, where no legal advice was allowed to the counsel for defence, even in the face of the fact that I myself had to defend the case in the Special Court,—where all sorts of communications were withheld including the registered letters, and my removal to Madras at the time of appeal was objected to on administrative grounds—not one of these reasons though broadly suggestive, but there were certain other subtle incidents that brought to my mind the suggestion of Andamans. At Coimbatore the doctors measured carefully my height and breadth hand to hand, took all possible dimensions of the head, and got me photographed inside the jail. Doctors were throwing hints suggesting danger in me, quoting the Judge's sayings.

The latest was, of course, the medical congregation held over my person. Most of all I began to experience a strange predilection owing to the astrological calculations of my horoscope which half in play and half in fun I began to take to as a hobby at the time. By the 11th January the Moon in Saturn of the period of Mars would pass away and I was of strong conviction that before that period I might as well be on a voyage. It is neither the time nor the place to enter into discussions as to the

validity or scientific basis of the astrological calculations. But I only intend to carry my readers to all my strange feelings, imposed upon me because of a vehement desire for a change of place from that devil's inferno of Coimbatore Jail.

That day was Saturday. Since that morning I was restless. I found no immediate signs of my removal. Some even told me that the "Maharaja" would not sail till January 28th. I was so angry and disappointed that my calculations should be so hopelessly wrong and I cursed astrology and my knowledge of it.

It was only at 12 that I got an unreliable information that my "rations for tomorrow" were not given in the kitchen as usual. I didn't mind that hopeful suggestion. The "Maharaja" would not sail till the 28th! How dare it stay so long and throw my calculations into its engine fire! Damn it. But after all there was not even any shadow of a hint from the official side as to my removal, much less to Andamans. Yet I was hoping and dreading, feeling and fearing, wishing and hating. What was Andamans, where was it, what would it be like! These were the questions to which I was attracted and repelled.

After 12, all the Prisoners went away to their workshop. There was one Mr. Mosi who would partake my thoughts and feelings in this connection. "You may not be sent after all! Don't you worry! By 4-30 I will be here....." and he went away to the printing workshop.

I began to wander in the yard, the terrible feeling of disappointment, that 11th January was passing away

without taking me along with it, that "Maharaja" would not sail,—that the jail bosses were so heedless as not to send me off,—clicking in my head in a painful way. No; there would be no transfer, no Andamans, no sea voyage, nothing; and I went away into my cell.

But suppose if something would happen that I might be sent off to Andamans. This thought again came to the top like a piece of cork in a flask of water when the flask was turned upside down. But I did not dare to face that question. I was confident that it would not come, if it came that I would think of it then, and thus gave myself to a painful nap.

I was suddenly roused by the noise of the boots on the flag-stones before my cell. It was a warder and said "the jailer wants you at the gate, please come with me." I simply rose. My heart was heavy and dull. I thought of nothing. I followed the warder. When I neared the gate I saw some 40 prisoners sitting in fours. There was the Jailer and the Deputy Jailer and some sergeants. When I entered the main gate the Deputy Jailer came up to me and said "Mr. Bhayankarachari, you are going to Andamans. You are supplied with dress and all. Have you had your meals?" I shook my head in negation. It slowly came to my mind what actually happened. What I was wishing for and fearing much, had come at last. The inevitable had occurred. The two lakhs of public money squandered on courts and prosecutors brought me to this. My heart suddenly sank. I felt as though I was crushed by a formidable burden hanging on my shoulders. I was pale perhaps. I did not see my face in the mirror but I think it must have been pale and painful. No one

marked it for to their vision such things were common and might have blunted their further curiosity.

I strained much to look cheerful and to feel cheerful I was actually smiling. You must not ask me if the smile was like the dim light when the Moon was behind the white clouds—I realised I had to face it. Not with any inclination towards swaggering, nor turning to self assumption, I could claim to have faced graver events that could have chilled the blood of many a bold man. And yet had I to summon all the grimness in my resource to face this going to an unknown land ;——— land ? which was not bigger than a simple town ? How should I know even that ? It must be an island in the sea, that was all I learnt from geography.

In the midst of my mental ravings I was rudely awakened by the selfsame sound of the military boots of the sergeant. “Are you ready” he asked me. “Yes, why not ?” I was a bit irritated for fear that the sergeant might have guessed the hurricane blasting in my mind. “Just come this side. We are to start immediately” So I turned towards the Jailor. At that time his face seemed so soft and kind. He pressed my hands and said “Never mind. You will come back soon, I hope. You should not have been sent as your sentence is only 7 years of which you have already served nearly 2. Well, never mind.” I did never mind. I returned him a hearty hand-shake. The warders were standing by and looking at me. I almost smiled and threw my head in indication of taking leave. They actually looked sad, and they all bowed to me. The small gate was opened. All the prisoners were in the Vans and I was the last. I exchanged farewell noddings with all and came out-side

the gate. My van was close by. The sergeant opened the door and called me in. I stopped by it and looked back; the whole building looked so soft and so dear. I threw my head on one shoulder and cast a dreary glance at the edifice. I could not see, for I felt it was in mist. I was entering the closed Van, when a terrible thought crushed me down. "Suppose I go there—never to return—suppose something occurred to me as had occurred to many and I would be no more, then—I did not see my mother for the last time. This very feeling came across when I was about get drowned into the Kristna waters in 1927, December, at Bezwada. And it was a mere chance that I was saved then. This feeling again dominated my mind when I was about to go away to the Himalayas—to that unknown destination—on the 27th April 1928.

I almost collapsed on the bench; beside me sat the sergeant. The van started. I cast a miserable glance at the receding buildings of the Penitentiary. Not for one moment did I think that that very edifice was nothing but a jail where many patriotic souls suffered the indignities and humiliations from the callous officials since the beginning of the awakening in the country. Not for a moment did I think that it contained hundreds of victims to poverty, hence also to the law. Not for a moment did I remember that the lives of many of those poor devils were smothered off by the rope round the neck, and sand bags burdened to the legs by the pious verdict of law. I only thought of it as a portion of India. Meanwhile the van raced along with speed and smoothness. I began to devour every scene that came to my sight. The sergeant was droning on something—a sort of advice—a piece of sermon, a word of encouragement.

I was hearing, yet I was far away. I would notice his lips move, face gesticulate, hands supplementing his force of speech. "By this ship some Bengali returned before his sentence. He must have behaved well. You may also be back soon" and so on. "I may not see my mother, that is all" was the cruel feeling that was tormenting me much. Clad in a white and bordered saree—gold complexion, frightened eyes, anxious face with kumkum mark, hair parted in the middle, a small babe in the hands—was the vision of my mother when last I saw her a day before the judgment.

The van came to the wharf and the door opened. The sergeant got down and asked me to follow. I too got down and saw that I was by the side of a gigantic ship. There were Indian soldiers surrounding me with a Havildar and Subedhar before them.

So this was the "Maharaja" and it would sail this very day; after the sergeant signed some papers I was taken on to the ship. For the first time I saw the details of a sea going vessel. I was not in the past so particular as to visit ships in the harbour. The upper deck was accommodated for the 1st class passengers and the lower deck was for the 2nd class travellers. From the deck I was led down into a kind of big hall where all the Sepoys were lodging. Their kit and furniture made an impressive scene. The guns were at one side and the sentry led us into a narrow passage leading to barred and bolted cells. The door of the first cell was opened and my bedding was placed inside. "I am a 'B' class prisoner. Why do you keep me here?" I protested. "We have no accommodation" the official answered. "Why can't you put me in a cabin?" "We have not

sufficient escort to keep a separate sentry there also," and he went away. It was nearing 5 o'clock. 'I beckoned the sentry and opened my mouth to speak in Hindi and I realised I had to do so till my return. I learnt that the ship would start at 10-30 in the night. So after all the calculations were not wrong—wretched calculations that they were right in this unhappy way !

I spread my bed and stretched myself. The curiosity of the Sepoys was great. Sentry Lakshman asked me about my case, sentence and so on. I also felt a bit light at heart that I answered him enjoying how I was managing to explain myself in Hindi. But that man was using horrible Urdu words which I could not catch.

Somehow I was passing time. The more I was warding off the feeling of heaviness and oppression the more it was creeping over me.

The cell was near the engine and I was feeling hot and stuffy though it was winter. Again and again I was asking for the hour. I was determined to see when the ship would leave the harbour. In that very expectation I fell asleep.

Doog-doog-doog was the fleeing sound that penetrated to the recesses of my sound slumber, when instinctively I got up and rubbed my eyes and felt a heaving sensation under my feet. The ship was moving. I caught the port hole that would hardly allow the human head. I saw a sight so pathetic which I would never forget in my life. The harbour was receding, Madras was receding and India was receding. The buildings that were cutting figures in the rows of lights were

growing fainter and fainter. The lights themselves were growing rounder and rounder in smallness and standing against the stars in the western sky.

So this was leaving not home, not Coconada, not Andhra, nothing of that sort. I was leaving India. I never thought in terms of leaving India up till then. A confused picture of the past began to reel before my vision. India—for which I left my studies—my innocent and care-free life-boat got smashed and splintered ; India for which and on whose altar I placed my humble mite—life and its future, flesh and blood, emotions and tears, energy and exhaustion, hope and expectation—that India, at the very thought of which my heart danced, leapt and palpitated, that India was receding ; what happened. Was it free, no ! why not ?—How many times did this ship load off young rebels from the fond bosom of the mother country ! India was receding. Could I see it again ! Could I enter it in my life—could it be free ? Why did I not die in India in preference to this exile—this banishment, this deportation. I looked up again. There was nothing. A dim outline against the horizon with a faint and confused light. Immediately in front were high waves tossing the ship from side to side and a deep blue expanse. Again in the distance that dim light and vague outline. That was India. My India ; for which I wanted to give my utmost, my life. That India was no more to me. “Breathes there the man with soul so dead who never to himself hath said, this is my own my native land !” were the lines that vibrated then in my breast. “Sacrifice that shall not cease till our land be free !” was the feeling that was bursting out from my heart—again I looked intensely

tearing the distance and darkness and I found it no more.
Vande Mataram !

A sort of dull headache was persisting when I opened my eyes. It was already day-break. Lakshman was on duty still ; I looked about myself. It was a wonder how and when I reached my bed ; my head was on the bed, my body was almost on the floor. I must have cried a lot. I began to think. Yes, I was on the sea far off, from the main land. I experienced a sort of dull feeling at this but there was not that emotion. I was feeling the lightness in my heart just like the frame of the house when the roof has been gutted by fire. Like the thin white fumes of smoke ~~those dull feelings of separation were haunting my mind.~~ I looked at them with grimness and gloom but I was pathetic too like a mother looking at a weeping child when she herself was a victim to the brutal treatment of its father.

I had no mind to think of anything and so I got up and sat on the bed. What strangeness ! my head was actually reeling. I was experiencing an acute sense of nausea. The ship was rolling from side to side. I just got up to go to the window and have a look outside. I felt a suffocation in the throat and nausea. A convulsion in the belly, and I vomited a great lot. I again sat down but again vomited. In succession I vomited four times and the doctor was called for ; and it was a lady doctor ; she came and examined. No temperature ; nausea and headache. She gave me some medicine. But most of all she provided me with a pan to vomit and a urine bottle. I was lying for a while when they inquired if I wanted anything. I accepted tea, refusing the rest. But again the vomiting continued and when

the doctor was coming down, she too vomited and went to her cabin. For that day she was also a patient. Any how she sent me 3 doses of a mixture which I used, and afterwards I came to know that she was carrying this mixture sparingly for herself and partook of that with me so kindly.

So I was going to the Andamans. I first heard of it in V. D. Savarkar's life, that was so holy for me. There were various political prisoners, from all over India. Those that fought and failed for the freedom of India, young boys to aged men. How many would be there? What sort of life they were leading? Again that dreadful hunger-strike that sapped and ate away Mahabir Singh and two other young friends. How should I move with them! What about my future, and how the past would contribute to it? I was wondering. There was another sentry, a Pathan. I called him and opened with him a conversation. I was feeling well. No depression. No anxiety. No hope nor despair. No longing; and no dreading. I asked him about Andamans. How would that place look like. The answer was not enlightening. There were many babus (politicals). Nobody was allowed to go near the jail. Yes, jail—a cellular jail where these babus were kept. They would always remain inside, while the ordinary convicts would be outside eking their livelihood and so on.

That evening I was permitted to stroll on the deck. So I was taken there both hands fettered. For one hour I was watching the setting sun. It was so big and red. It was actually floating on the waters. Yes, water in front and water all round "Water, water every where, all the boards did shrink; water, water, every-

where, nor any drop to drink!" That night I slept comparatively with a lively heart. Now my curiosity rose as regards the strange islands, the life to lead there and the people to meet. They were all like gods with a halo of self-sacrifice around their heads. Yes they were true martyrs.

The next morning the doctor came slowly like a patient. She laughed and said she was too weak. She gave me some soap to wash myself with and ordered some lemons and fruits. I picked up the sentry again. It was funny that I should continue my conversation in Hindi. Very surreptitiously I was catching the new wording. For instance, *Jahaj hawa ghumna etc.*, when they were used by the Sepoys. I learnt from them that there were four companies at Port Blair, 2 Hindu, and Muhamdans of the same number. There were about 100 British soldiers. From the conversation that ensued I learnt a great lot about the outside life of Andamans. These military people came from the most distant parts of India, from Gharwal, Almora, Peshawer and Kabul, etc. They were open, frank, and hospitable to an unbelievable extent.

On the 15th morning the ship sighted the landscape and I was told they were the Nicobar Islands. I experienced the sort of feeling similar to one when I was going to Bhadradri on a boat and when the boat was moored at a distance from the land. The people would come down running. The landscape was high and undulating, hills at the back ground, huts in cluster and plantations in variety. So they were here. The ship stopped just at a distance from where we could see the island clearly; in small dingi boats people were coming

towards the ship. The green vegetation was in plenty, and the land was hilly though not so high. In the evening the ship again started. I had a very disturbed sleep. I was very anxious to get rid of this ship as I was practically starving.

It was six when I got up. I ran to the window and looked out. Lo! the land was in sight. It was rugged and irregular, hilly too and was full of green vegetations. I was not taken up to the deck as usual. I was watching from the cell. I was showering volleys of questions as to the exact time of disembarkment, on the sentry. The ship was terribly slow and it was turning round. That took an hour.

Meanwhile, the Deputy Jailor who was in charge of the whole batch came with the doctor and subedhar. The doctor asked me how I was and the Jailor asked me to get myself ready. The ship reached the wharf. The police officers came into the ship. I was told another launch would come to take me to the proper landing. My hands were fettered. My arms were tied. I was taken to the deck. Another hour passed, my head was reeling much. I was hardly able to walk. At last the subedhar caught hold of me against whom I leaned with all my weight and left this "Maharaja," a peculiar coincidence to an anti-imperialist like me and entered the small launch. All the other prisoners were also brought in and it started. No sooner, I saw big buildings and inquired about them very eagerly. "Cellular Jail, where you will stay" was the answer. There were clothes put to air suggesting bath and that sort of life. In 15 minutes I was brought to the landing place. When I got down I could not step forward. My head

and body were so terribly reeling. With the help of scupps I walked slowly; the jail was near and no conveyance was provided. I arrived at the main gate of the Cellular Jail.

CHAPTER II

The small door opened and I found myself before an elderly gentleman, perhaps the jailor. "Are you bad?" he greeted me laughing. "A little, my head is reeling badly." I replied. There were some other officials and also another gentleman looking at me with interest and curiosity. He was comrade Lokanath Bal—one of the leaders of the Armoury Raid Case. The jailor was much anxious and directed me without delay to the hospital. A lean doctor attended upon me. Incidentally enough he came from our Andhra. "You Andhras and Bengalis are poor in health" he used to joke subsequently, when he found me a regular patient in the hospital. My bed was arranged and I was removed to the quarantine adjacent to the hospital ward.

A few minutes past, when I heard some one calling me from outside, I lifted my head and saw a patient wishing me. I wished him in return and stretched myself, but again I heard him calling and wanting me to come outside. He was talking in Hindi. "Yes, I come from Cocanada—not Madras. Sentence 7 years." "Name?" My Name? What should I say? I was puzzled. Bhayankarachari. The man was taken aback. He was staring at me. I had great reason to regret giving that name. His name was Mokshada Ranjanckravarti. For my part I was more than puzzled; he would

say "Mokḥaḍa" which I could not make out etymologically. Subsequently he became my personal friend and continued to be so to the last. By this time I was feeling a bit better. I had a hot water bath and a chair was provided for me to sit outside. I then came to know that there were four kitchens there. It was a shock to me. I must be prepared to take meals from one of them! It was explained that they were started owing to the differences in ideology. I could not imagine how an ideology of a revolutionary was four fold and how, most of all, the differences in ideology found their way into the kitchen. A political prisoner had always to face the odds against the jail authorities, and differences within, to me, would constitute an entrance and a passage to that bureaucracy that would always seek any opportunity to split and shatter any organisation. I resolved to refuse food demanding to be sent away to India, for as a political I could not stake my prestige in approaching the jail authorities nor was I prepared to take meals from any one of those kitchens which meant isolation from the rest. But my meals were sent without my knowing wherefrom they had come. In the very next few hours, I was presented to the realities of the situation. Some friends of Mr. Chakravarty came asking me to take food for the time being and after coming inside to study the situation and see if anything could be done towards Co-operation. Of them comrade Radha Vallabh Gope was the foremost; a small and thin personage, not even five feet high, with silver rimmed oval glasses: decidedly a man of larger vision that would go even beyond Bengal.

I was in my cell when Ramzan the store keeper brought my clothing. I saw the mosquito net and felt

very happy. It was so nice and attractive. As a matter of fact I never used it. I might have seen a net once or twice. The reason was in our place the mosquitos nuisance was not much. Again in the evening I met my friend who introduced me to some others of whom Saradindu Bhattacharji was one ; a gentle soul who possessed the loving nature of a mother. There were nearly 15 others, most of them boys who had to depend upon him for each and every necessary of daily life. Bijoy Chakravarty was another who was so noble and unwavering a personage of the whole lot. These friends treated me with some of the hospital foodstuffs. I was so excited and could not contain myself. I was questioning this and that and from the conversations I came to realise the stiffness and tension of the political situation. My number was Pi 323. "What was this Pi ?" I asked ; and Bijoy babu replied that it was Political in condition. It looked feasible ; but I had a disturbing doubt if the Government was so subdued as to recognise us as Politicals. Later on he told me that it stood for "permanently incarcerated." It was further explained that according to a rule of the Andamans every Prisoner coming from India would be considered fit to be released from the jail immediately after the completion of the 3rd month. But this was amended or rather an exception to this rule was made and we had to be inside the jail for ever. The place where I was kept was called Yard No. 1 running at right angles to the Hospital ward. At 45° to this yard was Yard No. 2 with its back towards us and enclosed by these three buildings was an open ground with a shed used for taking exercise. The rest of the ground was used to play an apology of the football game ; for, the place was so miserably small that only 14

could play and often the ball would be going out or falling on the terrace. When it was 4 in the evening I began to hear the thumping of the football kicks. My friend called me out and introduced me to a middleaged gentleman standing in the field. He was sturdy and well built. He was Srijit Mohit Adhikari transported for life. There was another man standing by his side so stout of body and dark in complexion with such a big head that I was amused and interested. He was no other than Pranakrishna Chakravarthi of the Hilly Decoity case condemned to death and afterwards transported for life. They spoke to me about the differences existing in the kitchen affairs and asked me to consider the situation again. By this time I had to take the situation as it was and so I nodded to them accordingly. The play began and all the politicals came over there. In fact coming over there was the one and main item of their recreation. I was ever so anxious to see all the new friends and I was glad that I could see them on the very day of my arrival there. Some of them were playing when the ball jumped outside and they had to sit or to stand as they pleased till it was brought back. During that time comrade Suryanath Choubae of Patna Bomb Case came over there. He was condemned to death but the High Court sent him over to Andamans for life. While speaking to these friends I was called by some others at the other end of the corridor. "It is Mr. Dutt and others," somebody told me and I went over there. A lean emaciated personality was comrade B. K. Dutt. Siva Varma was lean and short and suffering from eye trouble, and Jai-deva Kapoor, though hardy of constitution, was still looking much depressed. Dr. Gayaprasad was over-

joyed to see me coming from Andhra where they all stayed for some years in Rajahmundry and other Jails.

It was rather late when I came back to my room. The mosquito net was arranged (but not spread) and in an hour the door was locked up. I returned to my bed from the Cell door after standing there for a time to look into the darkness prevailing outside. I saw the beautiful mosquito curtain and smiled at it. I also smiled at myself for possessing it without any seeking on my part. Even while smiling I felt a terrible pinch on my shoulder and my nerve telegraphs took that message to the hand that snapped forthwith against the shoulder. The hunt was over and it was a fat mosquito. It was so big and looked simply beautiful. I threw out the *carcase* of the mosquito and stretched myself on the bed. But no sooner had I stretched my legs in full than in rapid succession two or three of the same attacks were made on them. My legs made a hasty retreat and in despondency I began to scratch the affected parts; as though of auto-suggestion I understood the mosquito net should be spread. It was up till now out of my notice in 'stand-at-ease' order folding itself on the top. I spread it securely and saw all the inlets were strongly guarded by the sides of the nice new net. Then began the humming harmony of the raiding mosquitos. They were undaunted. They began to move up and down to all corners attacking the net as a whole and scrutinising for the smallest inlet. They were on search if the sewing machine forgot to connect one single thread so that two holes might be unpartitioned through which they could safely make their headway. But no. My net was in-let proof. My fortification was invulnerable. While I was enjoying the joy of sweet vengeance ac-

accompanied by this success, there occurred an unhappy sign of my back being undermined, I turned sharp and saw a black thing running into its trenches of the hospital pillows. I did not call it a bug all at once for it was so tremendously out of dimensions. I began to search for it. But it was a difficult task ; and at last I could catch it between my fingers and for sentimental reasons I threw it down out of my fort. Not to the mosquitos of course, for they too would not have the beggar. Meanwhile it was getting warmer and warmer inside my room. It was a welcome feature at first. But I began to feel stuffy and suffocated. It was hot and I began to perspire. There was not even a bit of breeze inside the Cell, while regular rambling gusts of wind were blowing and shaking the boughs and branches of the nearby trees as though sneering at the perspiring inmate of the cell. The mosquito net invulnerable to the raiding mosquitos did also prove a hindrance to the feeble flow of the poor breeze. With this I was profusely oozing and looked like a big fish just caught in the net from the waters. Bug rebellion and mosquito raid engaged my irritation and annoyance till 12 that night, when I decided to fall asleep, after the long journey without proper sleep or rest. In the midst of my slumber I was forcibly roused to the biting chillness that compelled my full attention, even while the sweating did not stop completely. I covered myself but removed the shirt. It was past one when I could actually sleep. The next morning when I woke up it was seven. I was not allowed to go down lest I should meet the others for the reason that I was in quarantine. But water was brought upstairs. Yes, I mean upstairs, for, I was on the first floor usually called the middle corridor. There

was also a top corridor. The hospital had only two floors. The ground floor was for the ordinaries and was fitted with electric fans. The upstairs was for the politicals. I had some tea when my friend Mokshada Babu called for me. He was at the hospital gate, opening to a gang way that would lead to where I was living. I went up to the gate which would not be opened by the sentry. My friend told me that he was going to the yard. He assured me that he would go over to me in the evening. Then I was informed that the superintendent was coming to see me. Major Absin retired and for the present Captain Choudary, the Senior Medical Officer for the Andamans and Nicobar Islands, was occupying his post. He entered my room along with the Jailor, Mr. Bense. I wished him in the Indian fashion and he greeted me with a good morning. "You came just yesterday?" he asked. "Yes, Doctor" I answered. "You were convicted at?" he asked. "Cocanada, Sir" replied the Jailor. "He is of the Cocanada Bomb case, sentenced for 14 years and the High Court got it down to seven." "Did you go to Cocanada?" He again asked me. I could not see his meaning. "I was at Cocanada" I put in. "That is, you belong to that place?" "Yes. I am an Andhra. Cocanada is my district town. I belong to that place." "I see" he demurred. "I hope you will be alright here. I just thought you must have gone over to Cocanada." With that he left me. I could not know what he meant. Ever since I began my political life I never thought myself other than an Indian. I never mentioned my country in terms other than India. My politics were Indian and my thoughts were Indian and hence was this confusion.

That evening some ordinary convicts serving as jail

warders and hailing from my place came over to see me. I learnt from them the conditions of the other prisoners. Their food was shown to me and it was little better than in Indian Jails. With this difference that "Dal" and "Vegetables" were cooked separately and chapaties or rice or half of both would be served. The diet was insufficient as was given to them. The vegetables day in and day out were leaves and leaves alone. "Dal" was not properly boiled and everybody was tired of that diet. I complained to them about my conditions in the Cell and they advised me to get my mattress which was of cotton. I told the doctor and I got my own mattress and pillows; but I was discharged from the hospital and milk was no more available to me. I changed the position of the cot that I might get some breeze and was ready with a blanket for immediate use. While I was still in the quarantine, our friends observed Lenin Day when Mr. Samboo Nath Azath came over to me. I have heard his name in Madras. Roshan Lal and Govinda Ram who were victims to the Royapuram Bomb Explosion and Inspector Susainathan's pistol shot were his colleagues. He was transported for life. He requested me to be his guest in his kitchen on that occasion. For, he said they were celebrating Lenin Day. I was informed that the people taking meals in that kitchen particularly favoured the cause of Russia. This gentleman brought me some books to read and treated me to some sweets. "You must not forget that what you are now enjoying you owe to the three deaths during the 'Hunger-Strike' in 1933" observed Bejoy Babu from the Hospital. He was young, about 23, and a constant patient there, suffering from severe piles and blood discharge. He was weak and was getting pal-

pitation of the heart. "Till the hunger-strike in 1933 we were no better than the ordinary prisoners. They were not allowed to go from yard to yard. The division 2 prisoners were not allowed to meet the others. Their kitchen was separate. The Division III people were getting meals from the general kitchen wherefrom the ordinaries would get their meals. There was much provocation and the treatment was unbearable. The hunger-strike was launched upon for better conditions. On the very fifth day comrade Mahavir Singh died of pneumonia when milk got into his lungs at the time of nasal feeding. Within 15 days, two other young boys died. Later on owing to the intervention of Col. Barker the 'Hunger-Strike' came to a close and these facilities were given. Now division II and III kitchens were allowed to join and cook a common diet under the management of the politicals. Exchange of rations was allowed. Football as you know was given and since then we can move within our area with one another. Now you can see how you are getting those sweets." While taking one of these sweets between the fingers the images of the martyrs figured before my vision and I could not eat them for some time. Meanwhile Mr. Mohit Adhikari was coming daily in the evening to the field and enquiring after my health. He cautioned me to hang the net and then go to bed. I complained to him my difficulties and he laughed. "You must manage somehow. The Government did not bring you here for purpose of enjoyment. You must put up with the conditions. There are many, you will see by and by, that are suffering a great lot." I little thought while talking to him that he would be the chosen victim to those very conditions prevailing there and succumb to them within a few months.

Mr. Chakravarthi came one evening and informed me that there would be a football match. I was not much interested in the play and so I was talking with him. The match began when the left back of the opposite side was coming to the goal just before me. He looked so sad, so pale, and so thin too. "Who is he?" I asked. "His name is Bholanath Rai" was the answer. "His sentence?" "8 years" "convicted in the Luke Shooting case" I remembered that case. Luke was the Jail Superintendent at Rajashahi. "He does not play generally" Mukhada Babu continued and that appealed to me very much. "Why does he look so thin? and pale? and he is even sad. Is he not doing well?" I asked. "Oh! suffering since his arrival here. He gets slow fever but he evades hospital. He is suffering from consumption, and 'gastrics'" "Is it so?" I put in to keep the conversation, but I was thinking of his poor health pale face and sad eyes. "You may be coming inside in a day or two" he went on. "Yes. Is there any room for me? and where am I to stay?" "Usually the Division II people stay in yard No. 5. There is the first room on the 2nd corridor that is vacant. I think you will be shifted there." "Is it a good room" I asked remembering the present Cell. "Not so good!" He replied. I never thought this phrase was synonym to "utterly wretched." I asked him to see for a better room if possible. He was all optimistic. But it was, I came to know afterwards, uttered for courtesy. Being weakened and besides being not allowed to go down I was given one man to supply me with water and to do other little things. He also came along with me from the Madras Jail. He hailed from Guntur. This man Veerasami was always looking after me. The day came

when I was to enter the main jail to lead a life of reality, a life, that would care little for dreams and emotions, a life of push and pull policy. In the evening Laul Singh—the incharge Havaldar for the Political Prisoners removed my kit into yard No. 5 into the very room in the main corridor. I left the yard No. 1 and found myself in the narrow tower-path a cemented ground-way running round the tower. The tower was a circular building containing three floors corresponding to those of the yards and one in addition from which rose a watch tower wherefrom the whole view could be commanded. A sentry would stand there on duty. For, that place was higher than the highest place in the jail. This tower was like the centre while all yards were arranged like the spokes of the wheel round it, the compound wall running in a rim like manner. The path was narrow and shady, not getting much of the sun. Passing by the gate of Yard No. 7 wherein I was told, the ordinary prisoners would live and work and that of Yard No. 6 I came to the gate of the Yard No. 5. This yard was in a small triangular compound with a kitchen and a dining shed. My room was on the first floor. So I went up. The scenery was superb. Just in front was a small island separated from this by a channel which just at that place widened into the main sea. The white buildings against the massive green were an impressive sight. The breeze was also fine. But when I entered the cell it was dark and distressing. The floor was washed and hence looked dampy. My cot and mosquito net were arranged to the best possible advantage. A small wooden table and chair were also provided as it was the custom in Bengal. “You can make it comfortable by and by” spoke Mukhada Babu while

looking to all these arrangements. I spread my blanket on the floor and made it comfortable. It was already getting dark, and the electric lights were already lit. The Cell looked not so bad after all. When it was meals time I asked Mukhada Babu to take meals with me. "For I am not accustomed to take meals in a big company" was my plea. "Oh! Yes" he said and this we continued for almost all the time I stayed there. When we came out of the Cell, the island was a beautiful sight with its rows of lights. The breeze was cool and soft. Just on the left corner was a cluster of cocoanut trees half hiding and half exposing the features of the island. The lights through the trees and leaves looked like a group of glow-worms. After lock-up I experienced the same condition as before. It was stuffy. Being the first Cell of the corridor not even a scent of breeze could come inside. The mosquito nuisance increased though the bugs were absent. (No wonder that the Government is reported to have spent Rs. 35 lakhs to kill mosquitoes.) This was so, for I was provided with a new cot and the bedding was mine. Late in the night I felt the chillness as usual and when I woke up it was Mukhada Babu who was waking me up. "True to my idea, I do not think it gross if I mention something about the latrine. Up till-now, I was alone in the Yard No. 1 and I used a separate room for it. Here it was not possible. So I had to go to the common latrine. It was a small shed with 8 partitions with a commode system, wooden planks with circular holes under which were big cylindrical drums. The yard accommodated 78 people. There were 2 kitchens and those that worked in them about 25 or so would also use the latrine. So much so there was a tremendous rush and it was difficult to get a vacancy

there. It was funny and annoying to wait outside and watch or peep in for vacancy. When I went in, the gumda was full and owing to my utter strangeness to use them the water in the vessel splashed up and fell on my clothes. The place was terrible at its best. So nasty and so awfully smelling, no cleanliness, nothing of this sort. People put leaves or papers inside the vessels before they use them. I somehow came out and took my bath immediately. After tea we began to go round every yard. Yard No. 4 was closed for us; for, it was for the ordinary prisoners and the Oil Mill was there to be used by them. Yard No. 3 was the biggest, accommodating 156 persons. It contained a very big shed used half for dining purposes and half for the library. I went up and saw another island connected to the main by some bridge or so where the commissioner's summer retreat was situated. The scenery was fine and engaging to the eye, this being the longest and facing the narrow sea.

It was for the most part airy and well lighted. But the rooms near the tower were again as uninhabitable as any. The Cells of the ground floor were simply miserable, dark, damp and depressing. There were some flower plants in the open yard, and a kitchen shed where the two other kitchens were working. Yard No. 2 was the worst of the lot. For the most part it was obstructed by Yard No. 3 running in its front. No breeze, but there was plenty of heat; the left corner rooms were a bit better, especially the rooms in the 2nd floor which faced a small fragment of distant sea, with a garden in its forefront. A hill was to the left side of the yard where many cocoanuts grew in cluster; just behind the sea-pool there were small hills figuring against the hori-

zon. There was a big hall which was commonly used for meals and meetings. In the corner was the latrine shed by the side of which was an enclosed well where subsequently I had to spend some of my sad and lonely evenings. Yard No. 1 was the play ground as was already told. In Yard No. 7, the ordinary prisoners worked in carpentry and some other handicraft works. Just between the wall, running from Yard No. 7 and the back side of Yard No. 1 there was a narrow path leading from the tower to the main gate. When reaching the gate, on the right side was the hospital and on the left was the kitchen and the hanging room. The hospital was breadthwise and on one side of it was a small experimental garden and at the back was the hospital kitchen and laundry. Just near the main gate was the instrument to tie the man for flogging. The whole jail was not very extensive. It could accommodate utmost 700 prisoners. The upstairs of the main gate provided quarters for the Chief Jailer and the Medical Officer. I was still getting the meals from that kitchen which first began to supply me without my knowledge but Mukhada Babu was taking meals in a different kitchen. Veerasami would go to the two kitchens and bring the meals. The day after I came inside Mukhada Babu approached me and said "The manager of the kitchen where you take meals says he has no objection if you change your kitchen." "But why should I?" I protested. "I do not know and do not want to know where from I get the meals. Let it be continued." "Yes, Yes! but he thinks because we are friendly, you can come to our kitchen." I was a bit annoyed. "Mukhada Babu, I do not know, you please see and manage my meals. If anybody asks me where I

am taking my meals, I simply say that I do not know and that you know better." He laughed and kept quiet. From that date, we were getting meals from the same kitchen—to the delight of Veerasami as his labour was simplified. But I was treated by the others as definitely belonging to one side which I did not like. I was a stranger in their midst; and a visitor to them, I did not want to partake in their jail politics; but the situation was such that I had to succumb to them mostly against my will and almost without my knowledge.

CHAPTER III

"The whole system of jail administration is but a scheme for slave labour in its fullest shape."

C. Rajagopalachari.

It is time enough that I should say something about the place and its history. The Andamans are a chain of islands in the Bay of Bengal extending from the North to the South some 800 in number. Most of them are not inhabited; that is to say, by the British subjects. May be there are hill tribes there. But the Nicobar Islands are inhabited by a tribe not inhospitable to the traders.

The original inhabitants of the Andamans bear a grudge towards the civilisers. They are short: not more than 4 feet and odd, dark and thick set. They wear leaves and eat raw fish and mostly live on trees or in the caves. How did they come over here? Who were their ancestors? What was the condition of the Andamans in the past? These are questions of geological

interest. There is an opinion current that as far back as 50000 to 25000 B.C. the present plains of Bengal and the sandy desert of the Rajputana were occupied by the two arms of the ocean as mentioned in Rigveda as Eastern and Western seas. South India was altogether disconnected from the North and formed the portion of the great continent ocean extending from Australia to Africa including the Andamans on the East and Laccadive on the West. These Andamanese are Negroids in character with curling hair, flat nose and low forehead, and suggest their descent from the Negroes of Africa. When the seismic changes occurred they were separated from the main land and were cut away from the developments of human intellect and so they were living in their primitive stages without any idea of what was going on outside. Later on when the British found these islands profitable for trade and for that purpose made these islands the penal settlement of the Indian Government these tribes came into clash with the modern technic. In the earlier days the Andamanese were in plenty, and fell easy victims to the gun shot of the civilisers. They resisted with bows and arrows with points dipped in the deadly poison. These were their silent shots and were not spared either. The British in order to combat these formidable foes and to guard the penal settlers who were also brave, risking on small boats for their freedom and effecting escapes, kept there four companies of Indian soldiers, two Hindus and two Mohammadans, and a Battalion of white soldiers. In the beginning there were regular scuffles between the Andamanese and the Government forces.

There is a story to this effect that some of the prisoners ran away from the penal settlement and entered

the forests where they were received by the tribesmen and lived there for a time. Some married the women of the tribes. Afterwards they came back, joined the Government and showed all the abodes and dwellings of the tribes who had them hunted out. Since then these natives are equally hostile to the Government and the settlers. A child belonging to that tribe was caught by the Government forces in one of those scuffles, and brought up under the care of the Government and at present he is, according to report, studying in India. There is another interesting story ; a party of some men and a girl of that tribe were going from one island to the other in a small dingey when the soldiers fired at them. The males died. The girl, it seems, jumped into the sea but was caught by the sepoys and brought over to the Roose Island. She was kept there for about 2 years. They used to say that she was very gloomy and was now and then casting miserable glances towards the distant hills where she was caught. She would eat only raw fish but would not touch anything cooked. It seems she would be terrified when asked to approach the weighing machine seeing the lever rod that looked like the muzzle of the gun. Some women were appointed to teach her and give her company. She would not wear cloth but if it was done by force she would remove it away and use a bunch of leaves instead. Whenever she would find flowers she would besot herself with joy. At this stage I was told another fact. In addition to the Andamanese there are some other people on the islands. They are also forest tribes knowing the language of the Andamanese. Some of them are engaged as the forest police. They are not exempt from the sudden and silent shafts when

found in the company of the settlers. One such youth, was asked to marry this girl by the Government and he promptly refused. He might have properly estimated the fury of the tribesmen when they would come to know of it. The girl was there for a long time and when the Government saw no earthly purpose of keeping her there they left her at the place where she was first captured. These are the stories told inside the jail by some of the local convicts and I request my readers to give them as much of validity as they deserve.

When the penal settlement was first established at Andamans many prisoners transported for life were sent over here. Their life was not an enviable lot. The place was full of shrubs and bushes, thorns and thistles and vast tracts of marshy areas. The mosquito nuisance was terrible. The water was malarious. The danger from the tribesmen was ever imminent. In addition to this the treatment meted to the prisoners was cruel and oppressive. The officers were cruel and callous and indifferent to the sufferings of the prisoners. The prisoners died in large numbers owing to the deficient system of medical aid ; besides, the burden of the work and the irresponsibility of the officers enhanced the death role to a pitiable height. When large vessels were unloading earth and stones to cover the marshy tracts and build the landing places many of the prisoners were buried underneath only because of the carelessness of the officers. In short these people were used as the beasts of burden and their life was intolerable. Lord Mayo, the then Governor-General of India, visited that place and elaborate arrangements were made to guard the route. But in the evening, it seems, when he was about to enter a boat a Pathan rushed towards him from ambush and

stabbed him to death. The man was immediately arrested. When questioned about his motive he replied that the life of the prisoners was made miserable by the authorities and as a consequence his anger was roused. So far is about the past history of the Andamans.

Port Blair is the place where the ship harbours. It is situated on the South Andaman Island. It is sufficiently large about 30 miles in circumference. This is the main area for penal settlement. All the prisoners live there ; also those having their wives and children. All the military people except the white men also have their residences in that island. The bull-work of the penal settlement is carried out from this place. There are small islands far and near and the settlement work is conducted there also. These prisoners are engaged in constructing roads, clearing the forest and tilling the land. There is a big saw mill and much of the wood is exported from this place.

The whole of the Andaman administration is under a Chief Commissioner directly responsible to the Government of India. There is also a Deputy Commissioner and District Officer all being Europeans. There are local Magistrates. The whole of the medical department is under an I. M. S. Officer who looks after the whole area. He is called the Senior Medical Officer. There are various hospitals under the Medical Officers who in their turn are guided by the S. M. O. There is the commander of the military police as the head of the police department. There is also the forest department. The quarters of the harbour officers and many of the local authorities except the Chief Commissioner and the S. M. O. are on this Island. These two officers have

their headquarters in the Roose Island which is 2 miles away across the sea running between as a channel.

According to the rule all the prisoners serving three months inside the Cellular Jail would be released forthwith. Since then they will be paid Rs. 10 per month and they are to work in the settlement. They will be kept in gangs, each gang under the control of a jailor, and a doctor. They are to work from morning 7 till 11-30 in the noon and from 12 to 4-30 in the evening. In the night they must come together to a shed where they will be locked up during the night. They cut the trees, clear the bushes, level the land and construct roads. If they are married and if their wives are willing to come over the Government will bring them at the State's expense. The wife will be paid Rs. 5 and the child Rs. 2 per mensem till it attains majority. This is what we may call the bright side of the settlement system and used for attracting the convicts from the Indian jails. From among the prisoners some are selected as jail officials such as warders. They are paid the same amount but they are comparatively free. Their business is to see others work regularly. From among them, people will be taken to a higher grade. They are called *tundells*. They are paid Rs. 12 to Rs. 15. They virtually command the whole gang. From among them some are given the highest of the grades and they are the Zamadars. In addition to this convict—official—bureaucracy there are the Pathans, stout and stalwart, who would do no work at all. None the less, they are paid and fed by the Government; they are usually brought to put down any disturbances in the gangs.

All the convicts working in the settlements are put

to all possible difficulties. By its very nature the work is very difficult, especially the construction of roads. These convict officers take money from them at the time of distributing work. A man paying Rs. 2 will be given a lighter task such as cutting trees and the man paying Rs. 4 will be kept within the settlement area and does a still lighter task such as sweeping etc. The man paying Rs. 5 is free from work and his lot will be better. Because of this system those that do not pay anything at all will have to do the heavy work of road construction. They would be arranged in fours with heavy iron levellers in hand. The convict officer regulates the time by counting numbers and they have to go on working according to that. Owing to this work many weaklings get consumption and fall victims to that terrible disease. In the days of steam rollers and modern technique, that man-power should be wasted in such a horrible manner is a matter of deep regret. Besides these inconveniences, their life would be made impossible, for, by not paying this unauthorised tax they are setting up a bad example to the other loyal payers. To extract this payment the prisoners are put to many kinds of difficulties. Sometimes the convicts rebel. At such times lathies would freely be used on them, but if they reply blow to blow, they will be arrested by the local police and would be sent to jail for insubordination from 3 months to 2 years. They would also be given the abominable corporal punishment.

There is also the horrible drink evil rampant among them. Here too the Government have control over the contracts besides being the masters of the Excise Department. Foreign wine flows in plenty ; so much so of the poor wages spent on the prisoners much comes back

into the British Treasury. After serving one year in the penal settlement the prisoner if he likes can work for himself and earn his own livelihood. But there is very little scope for that. The families are given separate quarters and the family man is exempt from the night lock up. There is no other place so much subject to the rough-shod regime of the police than this. Any private quarrel with a police officer finds the involved person inside the jail in the name of disciplinary action. Three months and flogging are as common as fines in India.

Under these conditions the lot of the prisoners working in the settlement is miserable. They deem themselves lucky if they are inside the jails for a longer term. This is the evil result of the non-official bribery system. The population of the Andamans is about 6000 of which there are not even 1000 females. 99 per cent of the crimes of any sort committed are directly due to this disproportion between the two sexes. There are murders and hangings. But the usual way in these cases is to cut off the nose instead of killing, for which 2 years and 30 cuts is the established punishment. To my understanding their life and lot are not at all satisfactory, and it is not far from truth if I may have to say that they are leading the lives of mere beasts of burden in misery and moral depravity oppressed and suppressed by the ruthless bureaucracy.

Once when I was in the hospital I observed my friends gathering together on the eastern side where from they could see the main gate. I too went to them and saw some of the jail officers standing near the triangular iron stand. I inquired and found that a prisoner for throwing a shoe at the District Officer was

sentenced to 2 years and 30 cuts. The Superintendent was Major Rogire and under his supervision the man was to be whipped. He was lean and hungry-looking. He was brought to the stand and his legs were set apart in the holes of the wooden plank and screwed. His hands were stretched upwards and screwed in the same manner. He was bare up to the waist till then. But his lower cloth was also removed and a thin loin cloth dipped in glycerine was wound round his waist. The Doctor felt the pulse. The Burmee with a cane in his hand was ready to strike. "One" cried the Jailer. The cane rose up, swung to and fro, and fell in a snap-pish manner on the lower portion of the buttocks. A terrible and heart rending cry—the cry of a painful animal or of a wounded bird filled the air. "Two" cried the jailor. Again the cane swung to and fro and came down in the same way. "Three" the Jailer went on, and again the cane came down in the regular and monotonous manner. All the while the man was writhing horribly. The cries rose to the highest pitch and gradually were dying down. The doctor was feeling the pulse. The loin cloth was stained with blood. The stretcher was there nearby. "Ten" the Jailer was crying. The cane rose in the air but I ran away to the other extremity of the hospital. I could not see that horrible scene. Yes! I plead guilty. The Political Prisoners were flogged by the jail officials in the same way. But this was before my arrival. After a few minutes it was over and the person was taken on the stretcher to the hospital. He was almost senseless. The doctors immediately attended on him. Afterwards I went to the prisoner stealthily and asked him what the matter was. He told me that he was harassed by the convict

officers to pay their monthly dues. All the while he was paying 'because he could not dare to oppose' them. This time he was unable to pay. His work was changed and he was given the worst task. He refused to do it. For that he was produced before the District Officer. When he complained against the tyranny of the lower officials the Officer did not hear him. He called him 'Badmash' for speaking against the officials. This so excited him that he threw his slipper against the Officer. It was a fact but he was so much excited that he did not give a second thought to that. He was severely beaten by the police in the lock-up even though the slipper did not touch the Officer. He was awarded 2 years rigorous imprisonment and 30 cuts. "Paying Rs. 5 what am I to eat Babu?" he explained. "I must buy my clothes, buy my food stuffs and look to various other expenses." I asked him why he could not have explained to the higher officials without resorting to this. "No use, Babujee, they only hear the words of their subordinates. Moreover how can I get the opportunity even if I venture to think of speaking to the C. C.? I will not be given any chance for that. The jailers and warders keep me back. If I push myself forward to complain, my bones will not be spared afterwards." The evil of this bribery is eating away the lives of those who cannot pay; for they had to do double the task—to make up for the work of those that are exempted from it by their regular payments. Also it is a punitive system for not paying and a preventive one for the others scaring them away. So much so they pay off either 2, 4 or 5 rupees and the system regularly goes on. The only people that do not pay are the Burmese. They are stout and strong built, and can get on with the

work of road construction. If they are harassed by these officers they will get easily excited and attack them violently so much so they are not provoked often. The Bengalees and the Madrasees are the first to pay off and escape from these officers. "What about the Telugu people?" I asked him smiling. "They are few in number but sometimes they also get excited. The Hindustanees do not like to pay, but they are obliged to do it, because of the harassment of the officers."

There were many who refused work and courted imprisonment. They would often be falling victims to the neglect of the officers. One man, Dalayya, coming from our parts finished the term of 14 years including the remission he got in Indian jails. But somehow he was not released. He refused to work and for such refusal he came into the jail. He reported to the Superintendent about the neglect of the officers and the Superintendent asked him to put forth a petition, but nothing was done for fear that it might go against the higher officers. After three months he went out but returned for the same offence. This time he went mad inside the jail. This in brief gives an idea about the ordinary prisoners.

From 1907 onwards the Government began to send political prisoners to the Andamans. The Delhi Conspiracy Case prisoners, and the Gadar Party prisoners were the first to be sent over there. Then the Savarcarr Brothers were brought down. Gradually prisoners from Bengal were also sent over to that place. The conditions of these political prisoners found a permanent place in history. They were segregated from one another and kept in isolation. They were made to do

hard tasks within the cells. About their sufferings there are volumes from various distinguished pens. "Read the stories of the Andamans and know the trials and tortures there, which consumed some of our finest revolutionary patriots" says Mr. C. S. Ranga, Iyer in his book "Voice from Prison." The climatic conditions were so injurious to the human habitation that many people were turning mad. "One of those unfortunate exiles in the Andamans is reported to have turned mad and then passed away. A month or two before his death he stripped himself naked," says the same author. The present condition of the politicals is in no way better than what it was, but is still worse. Here too we had one friend, Bachulal, who went mad. He removed all his clothes except a *longot*. He was bruising his body and hurting himself in other ways. He would abuse people for no cause and would go on till he would fall asleep and this man was many times punished severely by the still more mad authorities for his actions and abuses in utter insanity. In the year 1919 when the Montague-Chelmsford Reforms were inaugurated many of them were released and the rest were removed to the Indian Jails.

Since then till 1932 there were no politicals in the Andamans, but in 1932 the Chittagong Armoury Raid Case prisoners were the first to be sent over there. At the same time there was an amendment to the law by which all the political prisoners were called P. Is., i.e., 'permanently incarcerated' and they were not allowed to go out after the expiry of 3 months. They were to be inside the jails for ever, or till the expiry of their term. In 1933 the conditions as mentioned elsewhere were so unbearable that about 45 of the prisoners went on

hunger-strike. That continued for a long time. On the 5th day Mahavirsingh of the Lahore Conspiracy Case died as a result of forcible feeding, milk having gone into the lungs and two others passed away within fifteen days. Then Col. Barker went over there from Punjab. A compromise was effected and the hunger strike was called off. In 1934 and 1935 political prisoners from all over India were brought over there and in Jan. 1936 I was brought in.

CHAPTER IV

I was still in an excitement and was spending my time moving here and there. On the 3rd afternoon I went to the Yard No. 2 and was introduced to some friends. They laughed and told me frankly they were disappointed, they expected me to be very dark and stout with a clean crown and a tuft and so on ; they told me that I did not look like a Madrasedee. "I am not a Madrasedee," I protested. Then there was a stir in them. They expressed some signs that they mistook my nationality. "O ! I understand" said one. "You only went over there to work. I half expected it to be so. You come from Delhi I suppose."

"No, I come from Cocanada."

"O ! Where is it ? In Ajmir ?" asked one.

"No." I was getting out of sorts "It is in Andhra."

"Andhra ? Where is it ?" I could not reply them easily. When a whole province extending over 80,000

square miles and having a population of 30 millions was not even heard of before, I did not find it easy to explain it to them. "Did you hear of the Andhra University?" I asked him very calmly and pleasantly. "Yes, Yes" was the ignorant rejoinder. "It must be near Alighar." I was puzzled more than ever "No. You must have heard of the river Godavary." "Certainly, but it is in Madras." "No. Not so, Strictly speaking it is in Andhra. Of course the Government found it convenient to call the whole extent from the Mahanadi to the southern extremity as Madras Presidency. The fact is the Madras Presidency was formed first; later our province was left to the Government by the Nizam in bits and pieces. First the Northern Circars and then the Ceded Districts; and they were annexed to the Madras Presidency. As far back as in 1909 a movement similar to your Partition of Bengal was started in our place to separate our province, with the only difference that you were agitating for the union of Bengal. The idea of the Government is the same. If they wanted a partition in Bengal they do not want it in Madras for the same political reasons. The Congress has accepted our province on linguistic basis and we have representation in the A. I. C. C. provincially. In the Round Table Conference too, our question was in the forefront. But the Government steadily denied our demand. None the less, and for that very reason too, it has become a province. The University declares this in a most convincing manner. The Congress movement in that part has almost become its national trait." I stopped short. I felt it was not fair to go on like that pleading for the province. Those friends changed the topic. Meanwhile, Prana-krishna Babu came over there and all laughed at him.

For he was very dark and thickset. "Does he look like a Madrasedee?" one asked. I smiled. "I must beg your pardon I haven't had much of acquaintance with the Madrasedees. Cocanada is 400 miles north of Madras." "But you are also a Madrasedee" ejaculated this new comer. "No" replied some one of the company "He is an Andhra." "What?" shouted that man taken aback as though he heard the name of a strange animal. The situation was painful. All were much concerned, not to wound my feelings in view of the conversation that had taken place some minutes before. The explanation was most tiresome. It was done in the best manner possible only to save my face. There was no Andhra there. How should it look like when an ignorant man explains a thing not known to him? At that time I felt it was better to commit suicide rather than to live among people whose nationality is unknown and unrecognised. I, that never knew the spirit of provincialism, having joined the Congress at an early age and worked there since then, should have unconsciously developed an urge for separate nationality may look contradictory to the spirit of internationalism, but I beg to submit that even under the communistic society every language would be given the fullest freedom to develop; and this view is upheld by Stalin himself.

Next was my name. It was most ridiculous when Mokhada Babu was introducing me to his friends. Every one, on hearing my name, looked as though he turned deaf and Mokhada Babu had to repeat it; and that man nodding his head as though he knew it well enough would pronounce it badly and over-stressing. All these were done in my very presence, myself dying

out of shame. The unhappy fact was the Bengalees, could not differentiate between bh. & V.

Besides, 'Bhayankar' was an idiom in their language used for 'something terrible and unusual.'

After some un-successful attempts they began to call me as P. V. Acharya. That was simple enough and since then I was known as Acharya.

I was in the Hospital laid up with influenza. It was the second day of my detention. That day Dr. Todd was coming on rounds. When he was near one bed the patient asked for discharge. "You are a nice boy" he replied. "I like people asking for discharge instead of flooding the hospitals and lying on the beds—Yes, you can go." He then came to me. Without a second to lose I asked the doctor "May I go into the Yard, Doctor?" "You too! Very nice—but not to-day. You can go to-morrow." I was then getting 100 degrees temperature. The fact was the Doctor did not like many patients in the hospital. Such was his treatment that many suffered in the cells rather than going over to the hospital. There were three or four patients there and their diseases were such that they were expected to die at any time.

By this time I got a fair acquaintance with many of the prisoners. I did not find even one who was free from disease. One may go and enquire of any person. "Oh! Constipation" would be the general reply. The water was so bad; even though the division 3 and 2 prisoners were allowed to cook conjointly, the diet in general was poor. There were no green vegetables. The unripe Pappaya was a regular dish and to vegetarians like me it was simply miserable. They were given fish

some times, for, it was Bengalees' national food. For that day I could not stay in Yard No. 5.' It used to smell so badly that I had to go to another place to read. One evening when there was preparation of the fish, I finished my supper in my room and went to the dining shed in Yard No. 2 to see my friends while taking meals. The smell of the fish was so pungent that I could not help vomiting. Some one caught my head in his hands ; soon there was a gathering. "Why? What is the matter?" they questioned. "He is vomiting because of the smell," was the reply. "What? Of fish!" was another question as though I was committing a great offence. "But he will be accustomed in course of time" was an apology tendered on my behalf. To vomit because of the smell of the fish seemed to be an insult to their national diet. Such at least was the sense of some of the friends there. Except the fish on some occasions and pappaya the other vegetables were rare. Brinjals were the next frequent item. But even these vegetables were horribly small in quantity. Far from being liberally given even the usual quantity would not be supplied. There could not be a proper protest because of the kitchen division.' In a few days I saw quite a number of cases for bad throat, cough and rise in temperature. "What is the matter?" I would ask. "Oh! the weather does not suit me" would be the answer. In the evening times they would go to the hospital to get their throats touched and take some influenza mixture. "Are you getting temperature?" I asked one, on such occasions. "Yes it is more than 100." "Why don't you get yourselves admitted in the hospital?" "Well—I don't like it. The same medicine there too. Moreover I ain getting the temperature often."

“What is it with you?” I asked another. “I am suffering from Insomnia” was the reply. Though, I could claim to have known English fairly enough, I was puzzled at this word. I never knew and I did not suffer from such a disease. “Yes. I don’t get sleep in the nights. For hours I would lie down in my bed awake.” “Why?”. “I don’t know. When I was in India, I was fairly alright in spite of the privation I was undergoing there, but here I am a victim to this’ abominable disease. Moreover, I am suffering severely from constipation. For three or four days I do not have any motions.” I again heard India being mentioned thus and it was pathetic to hear that “Constipation” was the general complaint with one and all; except on days when I chanced to get some milk I was never having regular motions. But milk! while so many small boys were suffering mutely with looks of troubles and misery in their complaining eyes? It was out of question to think of milk. Yet I was taking my portion of milk!—Whether I took it for me or not is a separate question. Because of constipation some of them began to develop piles. Our Bijoy Babu was first a victim to constipation. It grew severe and then he began to pass blood. Anus injections and treatment of the kind were given, but to no effect.

Owing to this constipation, and general weakness, some of them were getting palpitation of the heart. Mr. Bholanath Roy was a special victim to this. He was getting temperature for months together, lost weight and in addition was suffering from serious constipation, gastritis and palpitation of the heart. The worst of all, owing to the miserable conditions and stagnated atmosphere, many of them were getting demented. Batchu

Lal went mad and was kept separately even by the time I went over there. He was reported to be one of the best workers. His condition was very pitiable. He would not speak anything coherently and some times he was getting violent. Gowrishankar Duby was a very nice gentleman. He would always come and open conversations with me. He was even discussing some political topic just previously and after a few days he showed the signs of mental defects. Another gentleman Bhupesh Benerjee was a very capable organiser and a good foot-ball player. He got mad and was completely out of our circle. During my stay there, not less than a dozen cases were re-patriated to India and then sent off to Ranchi Asylum in Bihar.

There was a sort of suffocation, a sort of dullness and lethargy in the psychology of that atmosphere. People going over there had to work against such odds and many of them were falling victims to those conditions. As soon as I returned from the hospital, (this must be the fourth or fifth time) I found everything dull. Rather, all my excitement was spent off. I was in a position to give some serious thought to my mind. As regards the past, I analysed it thoroughly since the time I was of age up-till-then, i.e., from 1930 when I first gave up my studies at the age of 19 and joined the active political movement till the present day. Then I thought of my future! The future course of the struggle for freedom. Most of all, it was a serious question now how I should spend my time there. As the one answer to all these problems, I took to reading.

In the morning at 5-30 when the door would be opened, I would get up automatically. Visit the latrine in expectation, but often with failure. Next for

15 minutes, I would take a sort of exercise. By 6-30 I would finish my bath. For, for more than half an hour I must be spending my time in the latrine. Such was the condition of the bowels of one and all. Sometimes I was even passing blood. These things I know would be indecent to the ears of society. I myself would feel so if some one would narrate them. But the fact, the reality, must not be crippled. Craik's Paradise must be depicted with all its charms, divine and super-human. From 6-30 to 7, I would be sitting silently looking at the rising sun or the vast and endless ocean that was directly visible from my cell. (Subsequently, I changed my cell from 27 to 43 in the same corridor.) At 7, the Tea would be brought in. (Or you may call it some sweet water with an apology—taste of tea and milk.) For, the division II prisoners were about 60 and nearly 240 were in division III and tea was only given for division II. Yet we all used to take it together. Later on I gave up tea and used to take one or two slices of bread, brown sugar and fresh water. From 7 to 11 according to my routine programme I would be reading books. Usually at 11-30 the dinner would be ready. I did not like the manner of cooking. They usually would not put salt but send it separately so that according to taste it might be mixed. Masuri Dal was one thing that was appreciated much and it was a national food with them. Of Masuri Dal they would talk in chorus. Generally, I gave up taking dal. I would take tharkari and some wheat cakes and plenty of water in the end. No butter-milk was taken of course. From 12 to 5 I would again be reading. At 5 p.m. I would go down, take bath, change the dress and go out into the field, meaning the compound of Yard No. 4 or Yard No. 6, where there

were some flower plants. By 7 the supper would be brought and till 10 when the lights would be switched off I would be reading again. This was the daily routine with me and also with many. But how long could one go on like this? I had a very severe headache and that increased due to this monotonous programme and as a result I had to go to hospital now and again. Meanwhile, Major Rogire came and took charge as Superintendent. Since then, the S.M.O. was not coming regularly, even on week days. He would come to the gate, consult the Major and would go away directly. Many of the patients wanted to see the S.M.O., but he was not available. The Major took charge when I was a patient for severe headache. He suspected blood pressure and took the reading once or twice. I was almost bed-ridden for I could not lift my head due to pain. I was in the hospital for 20 days, after which I felt a little better. One afternoon I went near the gate hearing the arrival of some Madras prisoners. While I was standing there, the Major came up and silently approached me. He wanted to surprise me by catching me in the very commitment of a breach of rules. I turned round and saw him. But I did not move. "So this is the way," he began, "You will not be getting headache when you are not watched," and he went away to the Quarantine. I was taken aback. I could not understand what he actually meant. Its meaning slowly struck me. When he was returning I stopped him and asked "What is it you just now told me Major?". "Yes—patients who are said to have been suffering from serious headache do not and should not get up from the bed and move all over." "No. One thing Major!" I am not so bad.* I asked of you already

for discharge. And you are not leaving me. Secondly, did you ever ask me not to move from my bed? Did you tell me that I was a bed patient? ". "No no. Not that. I only mean that you should not move about in the hot time of the day, lest you should get headache again." "My Dear Major! In the tropical place like the Andamans which portion of the day do you set out as the hot portion? Besides, now it is not very hot, for, it is already past three. I just now got up from sleep and walked over here." "Alright then," and he went away. Yet I was much perturbed. I told my friends and they consulted the others in the yards. We were thinking of getting discharged one by one and boycotted the hospital. The doctor could suggest that people would come over there without any disease! The next morning, when he came on rounds I felt a bit desperate. He came to my bed and asked, "How are you? ". "Please discharge me." "How are you?" again he asked. "Please discharge me" was my reply. "I am asking you, how do you do? ". "And I am asking you to discharge me immediately" I retorted persistently. He looked into my face, "What is the matter?" he asked. "After what you hinted yesterday, it is not possible for me to stay here any longer. To tell me that I came here without any disease, that when you are watching I feign to be worse, and that on other occasions I was alright. Is it not? I did not expect this thing from an educated and responsible officer like you. I am very sorry. If I had no disease, why did you keep me here at all? That too for 20 days. Please discharge me immediately." I was almost excited. "You see! Mr. Acharya I did not mean all that. I was but concerned about your headache. You are the only serious

patient here. I did not like that you should move from your bed lest you should get a relapse." "But you never asked me not to leave the bed?" I challenged. "Yes yes," he said slowly. "If it is a misunderstanding, let us leave it here and bother about it no more" he said smilingly. I was completely disarmed and kept quiet. It would not be too much if I may have to say that Mr. Rogire was fair-minded in spite of his officious temper and uncompromising stubbornness which he showed in almost all the occasions.

There was another incident. He did not like anybody speaking in Bengali to S.M.O., for the simple reason that he did not know that language. One day, the S.M.O. visited the hospital at the repeated requests of the patients. At that time, there was one patient, a boy named Surane Vanik who was getting pain in the right leg which was suspected to be rheumatic. In addition, he was suffering from constipation and some abdominal complaints. He could talk neither English nor Hindi. For, the Bengalees had a peculiar knack of neglecting that language and distorting it to the funniest extent. So much so he could not be free with the Major. And when the S.M.O. came he began to speak in Bengali. The Major laughed and the S.M.O. refused to hear him in Bengali. He compelled him to speak in English. You can imagine the difficulty of one especially after knowing that the other knows his own mother tongue. However, the boy went on complaining in Bengali. The S.M.O. could not but hear him and translated the same to the Major in English. But he was answering the boy in English, which the boy could not understand. Exasperated Mr. Suren asked for discharge threatening if he were not discharged he would walk out of the hospital. So

he was discharged and later on he was punished with a curtailment of the days of his remission for non-observance of the hospital rules. Leaving that boy the S.M.O. came to me. I was watching the whole farce and I could not contain myself any more. "Will you please hear me, Doctor" I asked abruptly, to the greeting always usual with him whenever he saw me, which no doubt, showed his nobility of mind and the best of manners, peculiar to the Indian etiquette which many officials would not possess at all. "Well" said he. He was more than suspicious. "I am a patient admitted here for severe headache," I began, "I am hearing the conversation going on there. You perfectly know that that patient does not know English and when you were answering him in English, may I know if you are answering him or the Superintendent by your side? I am very sorry Doctor that it should have been the lot of the patients that they should thus be neglected. He has been suffering all these days from severe pain in the legs and there is no treatment for it. He cannot digest the diet prescribed to him because of stomach complaint. And he was suffering from serious constipation. But he is not properly looked after for this reason that he cannot put anything before the Major—and you come today and insist upon a language which the patient does not know." "But he knows English" retorted the S.M.O. "No Doctor, he does not know. He learnt half a dozen stray words here and there because of the environment. I know he is now reading a primer. I am very sorry to have spoken thus to you. But see—these are innocent boys who for what they believed to be the service to their nation were convicted and exiled. They have no father nor mother here. They cannot talk anything ex-

cept their mother tongue. They come here expecting a kind treatment from friends. They suffer here from various diseases inflicted upon them by the conditions of the place. Is it not the Doctors' duty to treat them with kindness and consideration? Please look over there! There is a patient admitted for slow fever and his case is being dispensed with by administering some pills of quinine. I don't mean to suggest anything on the medical line. But I am anxious that he should be properly attended to. At Coimbatore there was one friend Mr. Joseph. He was of weak constitution and was getting weaker. He was complaining of pain in the chest and we were laughing at him and at his weakness. Once Major Cockson took into his head to examine him and ordered to take his temperature in the evening. It was 99. The next day too it was the same between 99 and 100. He was sent for X-Ray examination and the report was that his lungs were badly affected. He was immediately sent away to the Welsley Asylum at Bellary. There are not less than 10 cases admitted for slow fever" and at once I remembered the case of my friend Mr. Mohit Athikary. He was admitted in the hospital for slow fever. Previously I used to ask him to seek admission into the hospital sufficiently early but he would not pay heed to my words. But now he responded and on the third day he profusely vomitted blood. He did so three or four times and in the very next ship he was sent away to Bengal. And I quoted his case. "Don't you know the case of Mohit Baboo? He was not treated at all till the eleventh hour and he is now in a dangerous condition. You may sak me as a patient to mind my own case. But you know every bit of the surroundings has its own effect on individual psychology.

I judge my surroundings according to the incidents that occur." And I was fairly exhausted. The S.M.O. was simply standing nearby and hearing me. Then he slowly moved away telling me that he would take all the slow fever cases into his hands. There were many serious cases, cases of Typhoid, Dysentery and serious attacks of Malaria.

Of all the conditions that militated against our health, the weather was the most serious, throwing down scores after scores into the hospitals with influenza. The funny side of it was that there are no seasons in the Andamans. The place is near the equator and so there is much heat. For that very reason, and because of the forest, there were irregular but heavy showers of rain and in the nights the erratic climate was such that the temperature would fall down suddenly and there was chillness. And these unhappy people unaccustomed to this kind of quixotic changes were falling ill. It would be funny and pathetic to see a friend moving well all over till evening and in the dead of night he would get temperature or sudden pains in the abdomen or heart palpitation or suffocation and so on and a stretcher and a doctor would come over there to take him to the hospital.

Once it so happened that some bad fish got into the kitchen. It was cooked as usual and all ate it. At the dead of night there was a general stir in the corridors. The sepoy were running up and down for the doctors. I was disturbed from my sleep and was anxiously watching it. Scores of people were being carried to the hospital. They were terribly vomiting and passing numberless motions. There was no space in the

hospital. The Major was sent for and it was an anxious night that he spent there. Some other patients vacated their beds and began to serve them.

The fact was that no vegetable was properly supplied and even fish that ought to be plenty owing to the easy availability in the ocean garden was too irregular—few and far between. And when it was supplied, it was taken with great relish and the question of quality was often neglected. It is not to suggest anything odd but on the other hand, it is suggestive of the treatment and the pathetic conditions ensuing therefrom. Nor was it the fault of the local authorities as a whole, the place and the climatic conditions were such that no green vegetables could be cultivated in such large quantities as to supply to 300 of us. In addition there were many officials and military people that depended upon the local cultivation. So-much-so, there would be little or nil when our turn came. The Secretariat was itself supplying the worst sort of cucumbers and dolly leaves, and that too for division II prisoners. The sea was mostly rough and there was no fish available to the Jail after being supplied to the whole population there. But I should say too that there was some effort on the part of the local authorities to meet this deficiency, although it was not successful.

CHAPTER V

“Eating is the chief event in the prison” said Sjt. C. Rajagopalachariar.

For most part life in the Andamans was dull. It would look as though the life was regulated by the bells that would now and then be rung, to announce this or that. The day begins with a bell for the ‘un-lock.’ There is the bell for tea. There is the bell for the doctor who goes round the yards with basketful medicines. “Davaai—Davaai” would be the cries in addition to the bell. If it is Monday there is a bell to go and stand in the file. Besides this, Lalsing would be balling out in his sing-song tone “Babu aiya—Babu aiya.” If it is a delivery day there will be another bell to go and take the letters. There is one bell for mid-day meals. There is another bell for tea at 4 in the evening, and there is still another bell at 5 to invite the audience to see the football play. There is the bell for supper. There is the bell for lock-up. Besides the regular routine there would be special bells for emergent meetings. For announcing the arrival of bulletins, newspapers and so on, and when the managers were sick of sitting idle, the bell would go on ringing. So if there was no bell there was no event. If you tell your friend such and such a thing happened yesterday you can expect the answer “no—was there any bell?”

Usually the diet would be better on Sundays. Some pudding would be served with tea in the morning and green vegetables were cooked in the noon. That day the dholl would be thick. Sometimes there would be a

small spoonful of ghee. On such days the general talk would be intermingled with the better diet and Abyssinian war—Dholl puri with Spanish United Front and the spoonful of ghee with the menace of Fascism and so on. That was the conditioned reflex of the human psychology and it could not be otherwise. When fish came, there would be an express message from the gate into the yard and there would be a general stir, but if the fish was a big one some times it was so and once it actually weighed more than 100 lbs.—and all would come in batches to have a look at that horrible thing—a look of admiration and appreciation, and the fish would be taken into the kitchen yard where I most unfortunately was staying. It would be taken in a small procession. Of course we would not go there with a definite purpose of seeing the fish. We would go to the dispensary and make a stand near the store-room outside which would be this horrible thing. All the while we would be discussing something and meanwhile the eyes would be working most eloquently. We would go to the hospital and come back at the very time, when the fish would be taken to the kitchen. Throughout the whole day that fish and its dimensions would be entering very serious discussions recurringly.

We were getting 'papers.' We were getting the *Illustrated Weekly Of India* containing commercial advices, eloquent suggestions for keeping health and beauty and the photos of the cinema stars. It would contain news about the military marches of the Italians in Abyssinia or the bomb raids in Barcelona, or the preparations for the Coronation of the Emperor. We were getting "The Statesman Weekly" which would tell us the good advices of Lord Zetland, the adamant attitude

of the Congress. These were the papers in English, *Bangavasi* and *Samadarsini* were the papers in Bengali, *Bharat* in Hindi and nothing in Telugu. Besides, we were getting at our cost the *Current History*, the *Foreign Affairs*, the *Review of Reviews*. We were also getting the *New York Times*, the costliest of the lot, and the *London Times*. The Indian news we were getting was very meagre. We were getting the *Hindu Weekly* but it was full of pictures, and articles on History and reviews of books. Whenever it gave news, columns after columns were smeared with soot. This was the fate of the Bengalee and Hindi papers too. Sometimes the columns were clipped and even the *Statesman* did many times become a victim to the official censorship and its columns were clipped. Even the *Illustrated Weekly* had had its own experience in that line. The *Manchester Guardian* was one that we frequently would go through. After repeated requests we were allowed the press telegrams printed in the form of a single sheet bulletin issued from the Chief Commissioner's press. This we would get at the end of a week, all the seven sheets pinned together. Each would be a small sheet containing news from all the quarters of the globe. We were kept informed of the Indian conditions in a brief manner. The *Manchester Guardian* and the *New York Times* would supply us with ample information about the international situation of the most subtle kind from Trotsky's International to Stalin's trials in Moscow, from Hitler's demands for colonies, to Japan's aggression, from Roosevelt's Supreme Court to Mr. Citrin's Trade Union talks. We had a fair collection of books too, from D. L. Roy's plays to Chendi Das's songs. We had Sarat Babu's novels, and Anrupa Devi's collections. We had also many books

of Binayakumar Sarcar on the present-day politics, but these were all in Bengali. We had also many collections in English. The fact was the Government indirectly recognised us as politicals though they would openly say that we were nothing less than terrorists and that was the best and the worst of it. For that very reason in all the Indian Jails the life was rendered miserable. For that very reason too the Government were supplying books on politics suitable to their own calculations. So there was light literature on Fascism as well as on Communism. Mostly we were having the up-to-date books on Spain, Germany and Japan. 'Spain Today,' 'Menace of Fascism,' 'Hitler over Europe,' 'Ferment in the Far East' and 'Inside Europe' were some of them. Any amount of these books and magazines could not remove the lethargy, gloom and dullness, the necessary symptoms of the stagnated and un-natural jail conditions from our minds. The climatic conditions added much of uneasiness to this gloomy life. The water and weather were simply wrecking the constitution and that was the reason why we were not fully benefited by the literary facilities given to us on a well calculated basis, to which, by the way, we did not completely succumb.

In that life of continued dullness it had become almost the habit with us to watch the arrival of the boat *Maharajah* ; for it would bring papers and magazines, letters from home and most of all, prisoners from Bengal. "There is no place where atmosphere is so full of expectancy as in the jail" said Mr. Rajagopalachari once. Every boat from Calcutta brought new recruits to the Andamans, and that day was the day of excitement. All would run down to Yard No. 1 to talk with them first from the field and then from the gate or at

least to have a look at them. They would be shouting from above, and we would be shouting from below. The excitement would be at the highest pitch for that day alone. From day to day it would be declining and it would be spent off completely on the day when they would come away into the yards. It was like a stone thrown into the dull calmness of a lake. The water would splash, the ripples would raise and gradually all the commotion would die away. On the day when the papers came there would be a stir and excitement. But that would last only for a day or two, for by that time all would have gone through the papers or heard the important news. The letters were a matter of interest for another day, and again there was dullness in the atmosphere. Again we would look to the next arrival of the *Maharajah*. From Rangoon and Madras it would bring teams of ordinary prisoners which meant nothing to us, and letters and papers. The Madras mail would bring a letter for me, and so I was interested in that. It would also bring us the *Hindu Weekly* which subsequently gave us some detailed news of India if they were not clipped or effaced. In the latter case we applied kerosine and cocoanut oil to the effaced columns and did many other manipulations but to no effect. The soot would go off no doubt but the print would also go away and we would have a clean sheet. When I got my letters I would go through them line by line as slowly as I could, detecting the various curves of the letters and trying to read the emotions then pervading in the writer's heart. When the letter came to a finish I would begin it again and this time I would go on criticising it. Usually when I was dull and lethargic I would take the collection of my letters and go through them one by one.

Many of my letters were from my sister containing a strong wave of emotion and a boundless expression of affection. The letters from my brother were no doubt emotional but were scholastic at the same time but I never had a letter from my mother. Is it not the greatest expression of the boundless love ?

In a month or two after my arrival there, the ship brought a batch of politicals from Calcutta. All were excited as usual and there was a special reason to get more interested for I heard some messages were brought from Bengal. Of the new arrivals one Dinesh Babu picked up again the kitchen question. "It is a shame they say in Bengal" he said "that there should be four kitchens in the Andamans." I too was interested for I was feeling the irksomeness of the unhappy division which made the authorities laugh behind our back at the very success of their policy of 'divide and rule.' He met some responsible members of each kitchen and spoke to them or rather delivered the messages he carried. I was introduced to him as one who first thought of unity in the kitchen and he told me his opinion. "You must see the kitchen fused and all dine together. We can have thousands of political differences but they need not necessarily enter our kitchen. Arguments are better means of propaganda than this sectarian method of kitchen dissension," I said to him. They called it madness when I suggested to them the fusion of the kitchen. They said the differences started on "ideological basis." But the gentleman seemed to be determined, either because of his own ideas or because of the men in Bengal jails wanted him to be so or due to the objective situation that demanded an immediate remedy to the existing disorder. The prominent people got themselves roused and

moved here and there taking a real interest in the matter. Three or four days passed—days of hope and despondency when talks and discussions took place. At last, a true fusion was effected. Owing to the tireless task of Messrs. Sathis Pakrashi, Niranjan Sen, and our Radha Vallabha Babu whom I have already introduced to you, the prisoners of the Andamans again boasted of a single political kitchen, a challenge to the British diplomacy of crude subterfuges. From that day to the last the kitchen was single and united and it helped much to the progressiveness of the political thought. Soon after the agreement there was general gathering and a Kitchen Board was elected consisting of nine members one of whom was the president, and another the secretary. The Board would function for three months. There would be 14 managers for every month who would offer their voluntary services under the direction of the Kitchen Board in all important matters. There were always the sittings of these Boards for considering the quality of rice, for complaining against the poor supply of vegetables and also for checking the monthly accounts which the managers prepared at the expiry of their term and it was all a sort of excitement, a variety of interest in that perpetual dullness. In this connection I always remember the small and fragile figure of Radha Vallabha Babu going from yard to yard, from corridor to corridor, from room to room, from person to person, pleading and cajoling, advising and admonishing and trying to bring a lasting harmony among the discordant groups. He was always of delicate health and was not a match to this burdensome task. Yet did he ever know how to take rest? When I tell him not to take so much trouble he would give me a weary smile and say

“Brother, it gives me too much pain to see so many dissensions within us.” Because of his accommodating and large hearted spirit he was always elected president of the Board, and his service to the house in keeping the general prestige was incalculable. He was here, he was there, he was moving all over, consulting this, arguing that and arranging the third. His patience and sagacity and his impartial decision were a matter of pride not only to Bengal but also to the whole of India. Such are the souls that constitute the Nation in its widest sense.

In spite of my regulation in day to day life and engagement in constant reading I somehow began to feel miserable. Of course I thought of home, mother and brothers but a sense of vagueness began to haunt me at certain times. It would be best suited if I express this feeling in Rajagopalachari's words. “A sudden weakness of heart inexpressible and not subject to reason occasionally seized me. It is, I believe, my craving for personal affection. I see about me prisoners, warders, and fellow non-co-operators. There is devotion, kindness and brotherliness but no love such as my heart wants. This comes on me as a void now and then and fills me with a kind of fear such as children must feel when they stay away from their mother.” At that time I took to reading the Essays on Gita but the effect of those learned discourses was temporary ; but books and rigidness saved me much from ‘weakness of heart.’ Sometimes I used to think of my mother so much and feel her absence so miserably that a hearty cry in a lonely place would alone be able to make me a man in the world again. I was even childish in thinking of her. There was a well in the Yard No. 2 and I used to sit upon it for hours and hours together looking at the

stars and racing with the clouds flowing over the sky. I certainly forgot that age was creeping upon me un-awares and that I was almost an old man passing 25. The sepoys who were living with their families used to bring their children to the hospital. One, Mohammad Uddin, used to bring his child for purposes of bandaging its boils. I would go over there, take the child into my arms and play with it as long as it was possible. Whenever bigger children came over there I would give them some bread and tea and spend my time with them in the main gate. Mostly I would be alone either on the well or in a lonely corner behind the hospital. "I was sad, I knew not what"—to use Shakespearian language.

The monotony of the jail life was to a little extent overcome by organising games. Once or twice these games were organised and all were too eager to attend and thus kill the groaning ennui. There were long jump, high jump and pole jump, running race and hurdle race and so on. The sack race was funny, the blind race comical and these excited a general laughter, which laughter was noisy and hilarious and almost burst out as a physical necessity. People would laugh and in the midst of their laughter suddenly realise that the matter was but trifling and the further portion of the laughter would end in hollowness. That evening would pass and the next day would dawn with the same dullness.

Even in this dullness there were activities or so to say the further symptoms of dullness. The wonder was no one thought that he was dull individually for he would find local incidents enough to excite. But that excitement and the causes for that excitement were merely various forms of the general dullness. Some of the friends began to take something like military train-

ing. It was funny and interesting—funny when the poor soldiers had to imagine bamboo sticks to be the long range modern rifles and when they organised sham fights among those sham soldiers in those sham conditions. It was interesting when there was a flag saluting function on Sunday morning when these ‘troops’ in the ‘military uniforms’ prepared from the “B” class dress would march before the flag in mock seriousness that would excite the audience to the utmost merriment. But the drill and these marches kept them in comparative activity and the training was not unscientific either. In the beginning a sergeant gave some instructions and some of the friends were acquainted with the drill of the Indian regiment. I joined that and continued for one week at the end of which I was laid up with fever and that was the last of it.

There was no lack of audience on any occasion nor was there any lack of those occasions. These two were inter-dependent. For any match, any game, any blessed thing, there would be found batches of friends plodding their weary path to the shed in the Yard No. 1. Not that they were dying with interest in those games, for no one would care to look into those games. If a goal was being made by any party, there would be laughing, shouting or at least smiling but those laughs, shouts and smiles were idle, dreary, and mirthless. Their faces were dull, and their looks gloomy. Nor would the players enjoy much. There was no energy, no enthusiasm, no spirit nor zeal as all was slowly eaten away by the heavenly climate of that Craik’s Paradise. Even if there was any commotion in the Yard No. 7 and even though nothing could be seen from outside, yet there would be a fair gathering at least as much as the gather-

ings of the well attended meetings reported in certain news papers. To kill this dullness we were indulging ourselves in funny ways. Once the kitchen welcomed suggestions to improve the general diet. There were some suggestions, of course for joke, to serve tea four times a day and there were counter suggestions to stop tea altogether. But the fact was that the Bengalees were accustomed to tea much. So there was a big procession organised advocating the drinking of tea. A harmonium was carried and songs were sung to its tune and in the middle there were slogans and shoutings "Drink tea—Drink tea." Many tea drinkers marched in procession to the general amusement. When they were passing from yard to yard singing and chanting the qualities of tea in Yard No. 6 there was an anti-demonstration and black flag procession by the non-tea-drinkers. There was much confusion and there were clashes between the two groups. I was standing by, for I would not take tea and at the same time I sympathised too heartily with the poor tea addicts. I liked them much and it was a great amusement. But when the excitement passed, again the same old dullness continued. These were but a few ripples in the stagnant waters. So it was greatly attended and all the 300 partook in the merriment as demonstrators, counter-demonstrators and spectators.

CHAPTER VI

“Comrade, I want to have a few minutes’ talk with you.” This approach was made to me, when I was sauntering in the yard No. 1 one day just after 6 p.m. We sat down on the grass, and my friend began :—“I hope you have seen the conditions here, what do you think about the KITCHEN AFFAIRS ?” “Yes,” I replied. “They are encouraging. It is a good sign socially and politically that we decided to have one kitchen.” “Yes ! but you must have known the reasons for its division at first.” I said that I did not know much. “It is political and depended upon the ideological differences. You see just this, comrade ! We were only enthusiastic when we were outside. We did not much care for the pros and cons of what we did. Out with blind emotion and falling a prey to sentimentality we did things that isolated us from the masses. We were shot down on the spot or hanged on the gallows but was there any response from the masses ? We took to terrorism without knowing the proper consequences. We ought to have gone to the very hearts of the masses by working with them, living in them, and feeling for them. We ought to have created consciousness by steady organisation and constant contact with them. We did things in haste and in ignorance. Had we been otherwise,—” He was going on with his speech in excitement. But I interrupted in the midst. “Who did in haste and in ignorance ?” “We did ; do you deny ?” he challenged. “No, at least not I” I ventured to stand his fury. “Do you mean to say that you committed acts of terrorism believing they would redeem our country and help

the lot of the poor ? ”—he persisted. “ I do not mean to, tell you whether I did anything or not. I was of course convicted under the Conspiracy Act and Explosives Act with a colour and character to overawe and undermine the British Government. It is not necessary to know if one had done this thing or that when we are discussing a particular theory ; and in that capacity I am telling you so. You may think you have done wrong and prove your convictions with arguments. But where you harm others, you have no right to include them in your theory and explanations.” My friend was a bit uncomfortable. He was highly annoyed with me that I should have spoken so, apparently supporting Terrorism in this blasphemous manner. “ At least you may kindly give me some reasons for your defending that theory of Terrorism ” ; “ I do not defend it,” I said very coldly—“ Then ? ” He was openly annoyed at my flagrant contradiction. “ I merely narrate an incident and look at it historically. You yourself have studied that in the absence of thesis, there is no room for anti-thesis. When you use the words “ Defend ” or “ Decry ” there is a great deal of subjective prejudice that mars the course of objective understanding. I never defend it or decry it. I simply read it historically.” My friend did not relish that I should bring here the scientific treatment and objective approach. He perhaps wanted to bring this theory from thence forwards. “ Will you please explain how you are applying dialectics to your argument ? ” He was very polite and formal. “ Yes, I am asking you to look at everything objectively taking leave of that subjective prejudice.” It was already too late and we found it difficult to get the gate opened and we had a very cold supper. This conversation was an

instance of the general discussions going on owing to the change of circumstances both subjectively and objectively. There were many of the opinion that they were wrong and misguided in participating in terrorism. Their arguments were sentimental though they would openly criticise that very sentiment and emotion. There were others too who dialectically argued that terrorism had its own place and produced its own effect in the wake of which and by other means too, the very objective of mass consciousness, was sufficiently attained, and it was no more needed in the future.

Sometimes there were general gatherings and open discussions for recapitulating the past. "If you think that terrorism had done something good, it means you have accepted it and what reason is there that you may not accept it in future also seeing its effectiveness. You seem to admit of its effect and you do not speak of its continuance in the future too; are you not self-contradictory?" was one question put in one of those gatherings. "There you are not rightly interpreting what I say. I never said anything whether it had done good or bad. I only pointed to you its dialectical advent. It was a historical necessity. Now you see the movement in the country; you know the Congress contested for elections and came out successful with an overwhelming majority of votes. That, so far, clearly indicates the mass consciousness. When I told you that a particular phase came for particular attainments is it logical to say especially, when that attainment was made the particular phase should recur in future? You have that subjective prejudice in you and that is why you are telling and attributing to others the very same subjective prejudice in asking why I could not accept this or

that, as though I could do it of my own free will.", "How are you sure that those conditions may not rise again?" "That is not the way of understanding history. If I say at a particular stage of civilization the Feudal System found its existence, does that mean to say that at this stage of financial capitalism that very feudalism can still stand? Can it be advocated? For if you do so, it would be a failure as the conditions to support it are not to be found in the present economic atmosphere. So much so, the general political movement and terrorism as one of its many phases, having its own effect, had progressed the conditions of society and now the society is definitely on a more forward basis than it was before; and it is logically absurd and historically unwarranted that terrorism should come up again. If at a particular stage of evolution, a small plant gives out the two halves of the seed, do you say at any other stage, the same will happen? If in the growth of man the child crawled, do you think, the same would happen again in that course of progress?"

"So you are of definite opinion that terrorism has no future in the course of our Political History." "Yes. I am definite. I proved it so historically and dialectically." "You say that you do not appraise terrorism. Whether we say it is a misguided policy or, say as you said that terrorism is a phase of historical necessity, the point is, we do not believe in terrorism. Is it not?"

"Say in its future advent." "Why," he asked. "I am very particular; not to defend the prestige of terrorism nor to take sides with its past glories, but I am interested that no subjective prejudice should prepossess the mind in giving a send off to that phase. If

we say we were misguided, we were ignorant, and we did not think well, all of which cannot stand to logical reasoning, our feelings had no part in the past phases of history and the same may happen in future also. This question of faith and all that kind of mystic talk had no effect. Here is a quotation about those people who lived here prior to us. 'They themselves revised the ideas and became believers in Ahimsa.' This was before 1919. What happened to that belief? Their reasoning was not scientific and was only due to their re-action owing to the jail privations. That was why their pronouncement of faith in Ahimsa was so poorly demonstrated to the country in the following years. We all knew it is not as a re-action to jail life that we were discussing the fate of terrorism. We one and all, if we see the future advent of terrorism, would go through the privation of this jail life most willingly to await time and opportunity. But we saw the historical changes. The Congress majority is the crying proof of the definite advancement of the mass mind in catching the public voice. It is a steady progress. There cannot be any retrogression on this point. Just as a man need not crawl as he did as a babe and a small tri-wheeler is not necessary now which he used in his childhood. It is in view of this that I definitely say that I have no belief in terrorism. If it is not the case, and our friends think out of sentiment only that they are wrong in believing terrorism, why do not they think out of the same sentiment that they were wrong in coming to this conclusion also?"

But as a whole one and all agreed that there was no place for terrorism in future and that was the result of our deep thought and deliberations. Reviewing the

past, reading the present and estimating the future ; it was on this basis that we began to divert our studies and political thoughts. I was really interested in this turn of mind and greatly welcomed that. We saw the new constitution and we agreed that it was a cruel hoax played upon India ; we agreed with the Leftist opinion that Office should not be accepted. It was our opinion that elections were to be contested only to demonstrate the popularity of the Congress in the country. On the 1st of April we all observed the anti-Constitution Day. Speeches were delivered condemning the new Constitution that was foisted on India by the moribund Imperialism. The Act was explained from item to item by various speakers. That opportunity was not missed by the young enthusiasts in vehemently denouncing terrorism as a misguided policy. The future course too was suggested—to create more political consciousness in the masses by having a direct contact with them ; taking up their immediate demands and trying for their relief and organising the masses in peasant-leagues and workers-unions. When the Congress decided to accept office there was an opinion that under the existing circumstances the Congress could not have done better. But there was also a bitter attack upon the policy of the Congress. We also observed the Spain Day when the policy of Italy and Germany was seriously criticised for bringing Spain to ruins. We were pained to see Stalin keeping up the farce of non-intervention when the Peoples' Government was in danger of collapse. We were expecting the united front of the English and French with the Soviet in helping the Spanish Government against Franco and his Confederates. There too, the organised terrorism of Franco was strongly condemned.

“No faith in terrorism” was the general voice always predominant in all these meetings and one and all strongly contributed to its unanimous and unique popularity. “Terrorism cannot be accommodated by the historical conditions of the present atmosphere and it is a bygone phase in the political history of India,” was the seasoned argument that found its place there. Anyhow, terrorism is now only a thing of the past.

CHAPTER VII

No sooner had I acquainted myself with my jail-mates than they began to open any conversation of general interest in a very funny manner. "Oh your countryman Mr. Narayana Chetty paid a visit to this place when we complained to him about the miserable conditions here. He gave a very sympathetic hearing and we were very much in expectancy that he would do something for us. But the wonder of wonders is that he described this place most eloquently as a pleasant abode and recommended to concentrate all the politicals here. He is also a Dewan Bahadur, that countryman of yours." This was the main point of all talk whenever any reference was made to him. "You may not know he is not an Andhra," I would suggest to them half in joke and half in concern. "He is our countryman," I would correct them sometimes in a laughing way. "But you see he is a funny man that Dewan Bahadur with a turban on his head and a full suit to encase this bowing personage. We all made representations to him." In this way they would make a huge joke of his person and his distinguished behaviour. But it was highly inconvenient for me especially when they would mention him in my presence and for my benefit. At the time he visited the Andamans I was still in India and I could not benefit myself with a review of his person. But I saw him once when he visited the Alipur Camp Jail at Bellary. There too he did not visit all the prisoners, especially the Andhras, for the minor reason that they demonstrated in an ugly way their emphatic objection to his beneficent visit. But then I was in the hospital and availed

myself of his presence. If I remember right, he very considerably recommended to the Government of Madras that in South India no one would use the butter-milk much and it need not be supplied inside the jails. But Mr. Rajagopalachari, very unhappily for him, disapproved this gentleman's theory based on solid facts complimentary to which scores of people died inside the jails out of dysentery by promptly adding butter milk to the prisoner's diet. To every one of these references I had to protest giving my own experiences with him, so that I might escape the stigma of our common nationality as the Bengalee people understood that word.

A few months rolled away and people began to forget the Dewan Bahadur's visit. We were all deeply engaged with our own politics, when one fine morning there was the bomb-shell-explosion that the Home Member Sir Henry Craik would be coming over there to visit the Islands. It was really an excitement. "Sir Craik is visiting us and let us represent our grievances to him. Let us be systematic in the representation so that he may know and sympathise with our demands," said our friends. Meetings were held, suggestions were solicited and discussions followed as regards the representations. From the lack of vegetables to the repatriation and release, all aspects were scrutinised. Not only did we cite the changes in the Indian politics but we also quoted international situation and its changes and demanded our release as the logical outcome. A draft was prepared wherein we clearly suggested our faith in other tactics than terrorism by referring to the international politics and demanded the release of all political prisoners, the withdrawal of all the repressive laws, and pending immediate repatriation we urged uniform

classification. There were even hot discussions when all were excited. Our one and only one intention was to escape from the gradual sapping up of our lives in that place. What would he do, that Home Member. Would he give us any relief? These were the burning questions of the day.

At last he came. We were all kept in the corridors of the various yards and locked up. The sepoys were shining gaudily though feeling uncomfortable in their rough and newly made uniforms. Lalsingh was crying in his sing-song tone asking the people to come down. I was in Yard No. 5, and when the party was coming inside I could hear the regular beatings of their boots. Lalsingh was going out and coming in to give us the latest news of the progress. "Bhitar Aya" he told us and went out again. "Chi number co Aya" Lalsingh blurted out and stood at the gate. The sound of the boots was directed towards our yard. The C. W. 'Sashin Home' was the only one standing outside just near the door. The first door was unlocked and a party of white soldiers with revolvers to their sides entered first. Then came the Superintendent, Captain Chowdary, beside whom was our distinguished guest. He was tall and bald on the head. He was rather feeling irksome which I could gather from his mood. Behind the party there were the C.M.P. and other police officials. He stood just in front of Mr. Home and asked "What is your name?" "Home" was our friend's answer. But this gentleman was so nervous that even before the question was finished he gave out his answer. Our guest could not make out anything and he questioned again feeling more and more fidgetive. "Your name?". "Home" and this name and home were so

inter-mixed that one could not be made out from the other. This went on twice or thrice. Náme, Home ; Náme, Home ; when the Jailer intervened and told Sir Craik that his name was Sashin Home. Next some of our friends went near the gate and requested him to hear their representation. That worthy was not willing to trust and stay there all the while hearing the representations. He wanted them to send a petition to the office and went away. We were making sport of the 'Name and Home' confusion for days on end when one day the ship brought us the bomb-shell that Sir Craik apart from considering our grievances described our hell as the only possible heaven on earth. "The Prisoner's Paradise" was a lyrical description of the place and the nicety of it. He declared that the politicals were much better off than when they were in Indian Jails and wanted nothing except repatriation and release, that the local officers were kind and considerate enough to all the prisoners and so on. This was more than the report of our Dewan Bahadur. Then followed the laudatory notes of the English Press in chorus to Sir Craik's poetic description of the Andamans. Whenever I was looking into the pale and gloomy faces of my young friends suffering from constipation and piles, from headache and insomnia, cough and temperature, lung effect and loss of weight and when I was thinking of friends that were repatriated in the last hour and finally lost their lives, I was very deeply feeling the cruel irony of our miserable position. There was a deep feeling of disgust and disappointment among our friends ; we were all filled with a helpless fury and mirthless laughter at our own plight.

We were plodding on wearily in that ever growing stagnation when a few months later we were again pre-

sented with another excitement. The Bulletin brought us the news that two Assembly members, Sir Yamin Khan and Mr. Rajoda Hansraj, were visiting us shortly. Again our hope was kindled and there was a general stir. Meetings were convened and discussions took place afresh as to how to draft a representation protesting at the same time against the callousness and indifference of the Government and the false and cruel hoax of Sir Craik. But as I was getting fever and headache I was admitted into the hospital and was staying there. One fine morning Major Rojire stood at the main gate and formally received his guests by throwing open the doors. With Gandhi-cap on his head Mr. Hansraj stirred in us that quaking wave of emotion that shook our very souls. He was a Congressman and that was enough for us. For my part I was standing near the door when I saw him enter the jail and my whole body was actually shaking with thrills and many an eye was misty. I was removed to my bed and in a few minutes followed by the S.M.O. and the Major the two guests came up into the hospital. We were seventy in the hospital suffering from slow fever, typhoid, malaria, constipation and piles. We were all lying on snow white beds provided for this occasion and were anxiously awaiting our visitors. When they all came to the first bed the patient comically said "I welcome you to this Prisoners' Paradise." Mr. Hansraj laughed outright and Sir Yamin Khan was silent, while the official hosts blinked profusely and looked at one another. Mr. Hansraj wanted that our history tickets should be produced. He came to every bed and spoke to every patient. We all told him about the climatic conditions that did not suit our health, about our ailments and so on. We put to him

that we should immediately be repatriated if it was not wanted that we should die in that place slowly. "I hope you have marked the crowded population of the hospital. It looks like the purgatory to Sir Craik's Paradise," I pointed out to him when he came round to my bed. "Please note the deplorable plight of the politicals here. These are young and innocent boys getting temperature daily in the evening. They are dosed with quinine. I do not mean to touch the medical discretion but there is great ground for anxiety. Let me point out to you with deep regret that one Mr. Mahit Adhikari, a middle-aged gentleman, was getting fever in the evening, but it was not much cared for. It was going on like that when at last he was admitted in the hospital. The next day he vomited a lot of blood. Then the authorities made haste in sending him over to India. But it was too late and very shortly afterwards he expired. Now you may see not less than twenty cases of slow fever. They are losing weight gradually and some of them are spitting blood. It is mostly due to the climate that is beastly treacherous, due to the hardness of the water bringing constipation and finally due to the air that is damp. We do not get any good food stuffs. There are not many green vegetables and the supply is poor. My friends are getting fish but not often, for here the sea for the most part is not calm." He was kind enough to hear every one and promised us to send in a report actually detailing the existing conditions. Meanwhile Sir Yamin Khan was speaking to Dr. Kesava Prasad of the 'Gaya Conspiracy Case' who was also suffering from fever and spitting blood. "I don't see why many of you may not see outside in the advent of the new constitution," he was actually observing and I heard it.

“ We don't mind to give a mild sort of undertaking ” was his flattering suggestion. But my friend did not make any answer. Undertaking ? Certainly not. That the honourable guest must have guessed. But we already began to speculate and float the theory of release of political prisoners after the promulgation of the new constitution for it means nothing but a change of policy on the part of the Government which up till now adopted the terrorising methods. Since then I began to think about the possibility of my release.

After a few weeks the papers brought us what was called as the ‘ unanimous report ’ of the visitors. It was a good place “ but the conditions of the politicals is a different matter ” was its gist, but there was nothing about repatriation.

A few months later I once happened to go to the Jailer's Office. “ He looks so innocent and is quite a youngster,” the jailer was remarking. A young gentleman was staying near him. He was convicted for attempting to shoot the Governor of Bengal, at Darjeeling. When I entered, the Jailer pointed me to the others and said “ see this P. I. 323 is so gentle and undisturbing,” but my prosecutor did not think like that. At least he did not want to say so. When I was coming out I was beside myself with excitement owing to the news that the Bengal Governor was to visit the Islands. This time things were not allowed to go on as they were won't to be. Many patients from the hospital were discharged even while they were on milk diet. There was one who was convicted in the Governor Shooting Case. He was removed to the Quarantine on the ground that he had itches and he was locked up in

the cell. All the wooden stands to keep the spitting vessels were removed. The shoes and sandals of the patients were taken down for that day. All the cells in the yards were searched and peaces, of wood were taken off. The same *Maharajah* brought the Governor in the morning at about 7 a.m. He visited the jail before 8. The arrangements were elaborate. Lalsingh was all attention. I was standing in the Yard No. 5 by the side of Sjt. Satyendranarayan Majumdar convicted in the Inter-Provincial case for 7 years. He was a small man of pleasant manners, well read and deeply sagacious. He was at Rajashahi and was speaking to me about the river Padda. He would also be telling me about his brother's son whom he used to beat. He would often fill my years, sometimes by force, with the songs of Tagore. One day he kept his tumbler in his cell to be filled with fresh water while he took a bathi to the latrine. I staying next but one door to him did not find my bathi and took away his tumbler to take my bath. Meanwhile he returned to the bathing place and threw his bathi in that narrow channel and said : "Mr. Acharya this is my torpedo." Throwing his tumbler into the water I added : "And here is your cruiser." He laughed at first and when made to understand that it was literally his own tumbler taken away by me without being filled up with water, he looked tragical and that excited my utmost mirth. We were so intimately moving, talking on all sorts of things poetic and political, to kill the dreadful time. Now when we were standing together he was telling me that Sir John Anderson was of different type when I told him the comedy of name and Home confusion.

He entered our yard. His gait was majestic. He

was far from looking like the previous knight Sir Henry Craik. He was stout and of middle height. He walked in silently and wished us good morning. He was also presented with a petition by all of us requesting him for immediate repatriation. He took the petition politely and with a good morning to all he left the yard. So this was Sir John Anderson, the Governor of Bengal, the perpetrator of the Black and Tan atrocities in Ireland. Unlike Sir Craik who was nervous and out of sorts this gentleman was calm and unperturbed. I told Mr. Satyan Babu about this. After he left the place our calculations began to increase four-fold. The current argument for his coming over there was that he wanted to satisfy himself personally all the police reports regarding the turn of mind of political prisoners before they could be released. But after a few weeks the papers brought the news that the Governor refused to consider the question of repatriation of the political prisoners and we were disappointed more than ever. My friends may wonder when I say that our drift of mind was reported to the Government by the police. But it was even so. The Bengal Government had a special branch of the Intelligence Bureau whose sole business was to watch the political thought of the prisoners. It was through their means we were getting books on Fascism, books that supported Hitler and Mussolini. We were also getting books on communalism supplied by the Government. By what surreptitious means I do not know, but every activity inside the jail was going on police records. The Government, it seems, were anxious to bring about a change in the minds to this effect.

We in the meantime got disgusted with the visitors and our representations, with our hopes and expecta-

tions, and their final rebuffs. Every ship going to Bengal while taking the P. I. Prisoners who were about to be released also took some patients whose health and energy was ruined in the heaven of Sir Craik. Yet there were patients filling the beds of the hospital, thronging the medicine room and ailing silently and uncomplainingly in the yards. Radha Vallabha Babu was seriously ill lying in the hospital and I was going there every day to see him. He was getting better and one day I heard that some officer was coming to visit the jail. He came accordingly and it was Babu Seshidar Majundar belonging to the central branch of the C. I. D. system of Bengal. He sat in the office and called for people "What is your future programme" he would ask, "if the Government are going to release you." He pointed out to them that the Government were in full know of their past and present activities. He also told them that their mind was diverted from terrorism. "In these circumstances what are you proposing to do." He called forth all the important people of Bengal and put this very question to them in various forms. Mr. Gope was asked for and this wonderful little gentleman was ready to get himself discharged even before he was fully cured. Now our hopes and expectations ran in the other direction. We felt that something was coming up in the very near future but facts were misleading. We found no signs of any conciliatory mood on the part of the Government. Our diet was worse in spite of the many efforts of the jail officials, to supply us with good vegetables. Our friends were getting weaker and weaker many drifting permanently into the hospital. One day I took my meals and immediately after I vomitted. I was tired of going to the hospital but the doctor came and took me

over there. I was getting slow temperature, palpitation in the heart and awful pain in the stomach. At this stage the climax was reached and the hunger strike began.

CHAPTER VIII

Just like the spontaneous revolution that always occurs without intervention of the leaders as the result of the prevailing discontent among the masses, the thought of hunger strike filled our political atmosphere. As usual the talks and discussions were going on between the leaders as to the feasibility and the necessity of the hunger strike.

I was an inpatient in the hospital, the doctor having ordered me not to move out of my bed. On the night of the 13th July 1937 I sat in a corner and gave myself to a kind of brooding absorption. I then thought that these discussions and deliberations were not of much avail. In those still hours of the night those young and ailing faces began to appear before my vision. The thought about those people who died in the Indian jails, and the friends that were sent away to the Ranchi Asylum began to disturb my confused vision. What would be the result if things were to go on in this way, if no repatriation occurred, if no relief was given to these ailing souls, suffering and dying? Should I join the hunger strike? What would be its result? But these were not questions to be discussed. In matters of political struggle individuals have not the right of personal discretion. "Theirs not to reason why, theirs is but to do and die." Yet I was weak and not able

even to walk much in the hospital. In spite of all my reasonings, I made up my mind not to come to any conclusion ; but the next morning I got a petition form and subconsciously enough I wrote my death warrant there. "The conditions of the politicals are such that many of them are turning mad, losing life or committing suicide. The climatic conditions of the Andamans do not allow the human life to flourish. We petitioned to the various visitors but were repeatedly rebuffed. It is not possible for any person to continue life here without certain danger to it. Unless immediate repatriation with uniform classification not lower than the present division II is acceded to I beg to inform the very Government that was responsible for our deportation, that from to-day I am going to refuse the slow-killing jail diet. An accession to the aforesaid demands or an amnesty meaning unconditional release thus depriving one of the present grounds to fight, will bring this to a close, or else there is also another alternative which the Government knows but too well." But I did not give it to any official. That day I was informed that I was to be placed before the Medical Board and might be sent off to India on medical grounds. This again upset my thoughts. The Congress had accepted Ministry in Madras and I knew the election manifesto according to which all political prisoners would be released immediately. On the 18th I came to the conclusion that I should not seek to escape. I was not alone in the Andamans, nor was I to lead an isolated life anywhere. That day was Sunday and I was a victim to the strange thought that on Monday something should happen. I was again restless. I suddenly suggested to some of my friends to prepare rasagullas in the hospital kitchen. We somehow managed

to get 16 pounds of milk and 6 pounds of sugar. By the evening the preparation was over. Meanwhile I was asking about the proceedings in the wards but there was not any decision. The night came and I was restless more than ever. I told not even a soul about my conflicting thoughts having had a serious experience with hunger-strike at Coimbatore. Since then I had no mind for hunger-strikes. But yet this time, of all the times, should I abstain from taking part in it? I called my friend and asked him to give me some rasagullas. "They will not be good to-night. If you take them in the morning they will be excellent." "Alright" I said and walked away. It was ten in the night and I began to move up and down. What would happen to-morrow. "Yes, I must start and go on with the hunger-strike" and I went to bed. Early in the morning I was given purgative and when I returned to my bed I was completely exhausted. While still lying on the bed I heard the exciting news that the Deputy Commissioner of Andamans was visiting the jail. I was stupefied that I should present my death warrant to no less an official than the D. C. himself. The D. C. went into the yards first. It was awful waiting for his arrival. He came but I was on the last bed. At last he approached me jovially and said: "Good morning, Mr. Acharya! How do you do?" "It is a case of slow fever and gastritis, Sir" said the doctor even before the greeting was complete. The D. C. happened to know me personally. One day he came to visit the jail. All my friends complained to him against the water supply and other local grievances. I complained to him about the attending system in the hospital. Hitherto some of us were going regularly according to stipulated hours to attend upon

the patients but Major Rogire stopped it and restricted that a limited number of people must be going there day-in and day-out. It was impossible, for no one of us was any way the better. All were suffering from one disease or the other. Only for the sake of the serious cases we made this arrangement. If 4 or 5 had to go as attendants for months together it would be practically unbearable for them. I suggested that a register should be maintained and for every 2 hours the batch would be changed leaving instructions and full details during the stay in the register for the information of the coming batch. Though it was not followed to the latter the system was going on in this way. Since then whenever the D. C. came over to visit us I was in his good looks. Moreover he would also be finding me often in the hospital. This time as usual he came to my bed and inquired of my health. "I am alright. Thank you please." Even while speaking I found myself suddenly cut short. My tongue fell and I could not speak further. The man was about to turn away when I pulled myself up and desperately stretched my hand to the side-table and got out the written form. "Please" I blurted out. The D. C. turned round for he was actually going away and came near me. "Have you anything to say Mr. Acharya." "This much. Will you please go through this" and I held out the form. "Before that I beg to tell you that the evolution of humanity at this stage does not admit of personal animosity in ignorance and unjust prejudice. Personally I like every Englishman, especially when he possesses the characteristics of mutual understanding. But I am openly and frankly against the system of Government run by that nation on the basis of exploitation, and that Government was responsible for

our deportation and our troubles and tortures in this exile. I have something to say in this connection. Will you please now read on ? ” I handed over the form to him and felt suddenly relieved. He took the paper read it and was simply taken aback. “ What ? Are you going on hunger-strike ? ” He asked. “ Yes please.” “ From to-day ? ” “ Yes.” “ I understand ” he said slowly. “ But I never expected you to be the first man. You were so ill all these days.” “ No please. I am not so bad. Besides, I am a prisoner first and patient next.” “ Is there anything with which you were dissatisfied in the hospital administration ? ” he asked. “ No my grievance is against the Government of India. Without immediate repatriation and uniform classification it may not be possible for me to give it up.” The Superintendent Major Clemans who succeeded Major Rogire was simply confused and the doctor Mr. Kushan who came from Madras was perturbed. I for my part having finished my business covered my body securely and was congratulating myself for doing away with it so briefly. “ Alright cheer up Mr. Acharya, I am going to inform the C.C.” and he began to move away. “ I want to see him again, Sir. I will dissuade him. He is a patient and cannot afford to go on hunger strike,” said the doctor in confusion. “ Yes, you can talk to him ” replied the D.C., but there was nothing to talk and they all went away. Immediately my friends came to my bed anxiously ; up-till now not a soul knew of my decision. “ Comrade, are you going on hunger strike ? Comrade, why are you beginning alone. Comrade, you never told us at all ? ”—these were only a few of the many questions showered on me. As I did not eat anything that morning and as I also took purgative, I was by this time fairly

exhausted. When the news was known in the yard many friends came over in a hurry to see me. "Brother, have you already started?" was the one voice that wrung my heart. It was Radha Vallabha Babu, the small, bald-headed, and large-hearted gentleman. He asked me to stop the strike for the time being so that some of us might begin it jointly in a short time. I wanted that they should begin it immediately. So I did not accede to his request. Meanwhile the Superintendent came up to give me a warning. "If in 24 hours you do not give up the hunger-strike, you will be liable for prosecution, and other jail punishments. I come here to-morrow exactly by this time. Please consider meanwhile," said he and went away. But I only saw him again on 17th September, when he came to tell me that I was going to India on the 22nd of that month.

All my friends that came to plead with me went away with a deep feeling in their hearts. The doctor came back and took down my home address. By evening I was already getting weaker. In the night the doctor came again and asked me if I was taking water. "No," said I, and he was more than perturbed. "Do take water; it was taken in all the hunger-strikes. Why do you give it up? It proves dangerous to your life." I could only smile. Danger to life? It is no revelation to me. Hunger-strike is such and it would but lead to that. That night too my friends came to me and told me that in the previous hunger-strike all took water and now also they would be taking water and salt. "Mr. Acharya, Please take water." Who was that? I opened my eyes. It was no other than our 'Madrasee'—Pranakrishna Chakravarti. He was an all-round stout competitor—a stout body, a stout head and a stout heart.

Who could know that under that very bluntness lay an unfathomable heart and critical intellect? "Take water, Mr. Bhayankar!"—this was Dr. Bhupal Chandra Bose, one of the very few intellects who had the capacity of thinking in the right way. He was deeply studied and widely informed. In short he was an authority not only in medicine, but also in science and politics. Whenever I was dull I would run up to his cell and recreate myself by some discussion. Mokhada Babu also came to me and sat by my side, but he could never open his mouth. "I am going," he said at last. "Please take water."

The second day dawned. That night I slept almost unconsciously. I bathed my face and that was all. As it got hotter I began to feel more and more exhausted. I could not open my eyes for the light was very glaring. Curtains were arranged round my bed. The doctors came and noted down my pulse and temperature. That day too friends were coming and that was a sort of strength to me. "Take water." Pranakrishna Babu was harsh. Yes, harsh with the intensity of love and concern. I had to keep quiet for I was weak and also I was not able to give them a pleasing reply. From that evening my pulse began to fall down. The doctors wanted to feed me by force, but I resisted. So they had to go away. That night I could not sleep at all. There was a burning sensation from the throat right down to the stomach. A sort of suffocation and uneasiness. I began to feel great pain in the knees. It was ten, eleven and twelve.....and I had no sleep. I was counting the hours. It was one.....two.....past two.....and I was rolling on the bed from side to side. I did not groan only because I was conscious that this was a self-inflicted ordeal. In the early hours of the day I fell

asleep. It was eight in the morning when I got up. I was actually unable to open my eyes. There was a sort of whizzing in the ears and lightness in the body. I felt as though I was relieved of much, lost much, and set apart much. The burning sensation in the stomach was all the more acute. That is the only expression for that sensation. It was as if you entered a mine or a hot room. I was already removed from the hospital and was taken to a room in the quarantine, partly as a punishment and partly for convenience. Punishment because the C. C. gave orders that the hunger-strikers should be kept in the cells. Convenient because I could not bear the light at all and the doctor was very anxious that I should not catch cold. The door of my cell was not locked up because I was already bed-ridden. "Good morning, Mr. Acharya,"—this was the S.M.O. He told me that I should not go on hunger-strike when I was already a patient in the hospital, that my case was already before the Medical Board, and I might after all be repatriated on medical grounds. "Yes doctor, you are right, but the case is not an individual one," was all that I could say. "Please take water at least, even Mahatma Gandhi took it at the time of his hunger-strike. Is it not?" "Yes doctor," I told him "but conceptions may differ. When I am offering myself to death by denying food on protest, I cannot reconcile myself to take water. Instead of giving strength to your determination, it would only weaken the cause by prolonging life." The S. M. O. took my temperature, as the J. M. O. examined the pulse. That evening the doctors came with a batch of Burmese to give me a nasal feed. "Mr. Acharya, I want to feed you." I opened my eyes and saw the pale face of Dr. Kushan. Our eyes met. I

again closed my eyes. He touched my cheeks with his hand and I slowly brought my hand to my chest and pressed his hand against my cheek. It was so comforting. Words fail to portray the nobility of some good souls. A sigh and a touch would, however, fully demonstrate their worth and value. But for Dr. Kishan in that ordeal many of us would have been lost to the tossing waves of the hungry sea. "Mr. Acharya, I must feed you now by force. By not taking water you are collapsing too early." He brought the tube near my nose, and I resisted. What resistance? My head was swimming as previously. I could not raise my hand, nor move my legs. The Burmese caught hold of my hands and legs, while a doctor caught my head and the tube besmeared with olive oil was thrust into the left nostril. Bha! It was very painful. I cannot now fully explain my feelings at that time. In these days of science and research it would not be irrelevant if we are a bit outspoken while speaking of the working of our minds under strange conditions. I felt myself a victim—a virgin martyr. The doctor was pleading with me to swallow the tube. But as I refused, he had to press in the tube and blood began to come out of the nose and water from the eyes. "O! Mr. Acharya, please swallow the tube." The doctor was speaking very miserably. The tube went down and I do not know what happened, but I began to cough violently. The tube was taken out and inserted in the other nostril. My whole body was trembling violently. The men were catching hold of me tightly, but at the same time kindly. Milk was poured down slowly and at last the tube was removed. I felt relieved. Had the milk been left inside I could have continued the strike for a longer time, but I felt it must

not be left inside. So I drew in the sides of the stomach and brought the diaphragm upwards just as we do when we attempt udayana and without any effort all the milk came out with a terrible vomit. The doctor was seeing this and could not stay there any more. He went away with tears in his eyes. He came back with a towel and cleaned my mouth, nose and eyes. "Please try to keep something inside," he said and, keeping a man there to look after me, went away.

On the 24th morning there was a great stir everywhere. 167 of my comrades were on hunger-strike. They got a reply from the India Government that their demands could not be looked into. The C. C. and the S. M. O. visited the jail and the Doctors told him that my case was bad. I heard him coming inside my cell. I could not open my eyes because, for me it was a terrible task at that time. "He is not taking even water Sir" was the wail of the doctor. "His throat is bad too," said the S.M.O. "He is suffering from the beginning like that"—"the tube is not going inside, Sir"—"it is not possible to feed him through the nose?"—"blood is coming out...." "try through the mouth,"...."does he open his mouth—"no, Sir"...."rectal feed?".... We will try, Sir".....such was the jumbling noise in the cell. Then all was silence. There was a workshop just behind my cell. Only then did I realise that the noise was terrible, though it was not newly started. I complained to the doctor, but what could be done? Under normal conditions it was nothing and you would not notice it at all.

On the 28th a batch of my friends who were to be released or repatriated on medical grounds were going

to Bengal. Two of the hunger-strikers were among them. One, Malaya Babu, somehow managed to come to my cell in the night and woke me up. "What shall I do, Mr. Acharya?" he asked plaintively. I pressed his hand to my bosom and kept quiet. "Please take water. You see all our comrades are taking." "Please tell them to continue," I spoke with effort. It was nine in the night. I was laughing within me. "What? Am I really serious?" I did not feel anything except a dull pain and a whirring in the head. Presently the noise of boots was coming towards me, and the light was switched on. I could not bear the light and screamed out in pain. The light was switched off. My hand was taken in. "Good evening Mr. Acharya." It was the doctor again. "I have come now to tell you one thing. You are a man of education and culture. You must know what is happening to you," said the doctor in a clear tone. "If you continue like this without taking water you may not survive more than 3 days." There was a thrill in my heart. I guessed it, but could not know definitely. Meanwhile the doctor ordered for a blue cloth to be tied round the light. The light was put on and my pulse was read. He saw my eyes and tongue. "Please answer me. I am not asking you to take your meals. At least take some water. Look here please! Open your eyes." I opened my eyes. "Did you inform my mother," I asked him with immense difficulty. There was a thud in the heart and a gulp in the throat. With a cruel grimace I clenched my teeth and kept silent. "Yes, the C. C. might have sent a telegram to your people, but why don't you take some water. Don't you see you are dying." "No doctor" I replied. "I don't die." "But, you see, you are driving life out of your body." "No

matter this body, doctor. This may go, but I see I don't die." The doctor did not understand me. "Do you mean your name will live, though your body dies." "No the name too does not live long. I see life in continuity not in isolation."

"Which Goddess are you worshipping, Mr. Acharya, even without taking water," he asked me on one of those occasions. "The Goddess of humanity" I replied "The collective life of the universe: man, bird and beast." The doctor, if he chooses, can better describe our talk for much of it I cannot now recollect. He was coming and feeling me with his own hands, but he was also seeing me vomit before his very eyes. The hunger-strikers were swelling in numbers. They were now more than 200. One day I heard the S.M.O. telling the C. C. that a telegram came from home inquiring after my condition and that I was placed in the "seriously-ill" list. The S.M.O. was coming regularly in the morning. The medical staff was always on duty. Dr. Sangatha Roy was personally giving me the sponge bath with utmost care. Even on the new-born child so much of care would not be lavished. On the first day the S.M.O. was personally present. "One leg first, dry it and cover it, then the other leg, cover both; take the hand, the chest and the face," and so on he was giving instructions.

One evening whether I was drowsing or dreaming I could not tell, but I felt I was swinging in a cradle or swimming in a pool of hot water. There was a tingling sense in the body and a hilarious sensation all over. How do you feel when you recline on the cushions in a motor car when it speeds at 60 miles per hour? I felt

that sensation, and did not feel the body at all. Turning from side to side was an ordeal. Even while wanting to turn I would be postponing it for hours, but remaining in one particular posture meant a tremendous effort. When I was on my left the heart was pressed so hard that there would be a great feeling of suffocation; when I was on my back the backbone would be aching; when I turned to the right the left shoulder would fall on my heart and cause pressure and suffocation. And I had to try these three postures one after another.

While I was thus fighting with bodily pain, the doctor came in. He felt my pulse and went down immediately to the office. He ran up again and gave me an injection. All this happened within a few minutes. He did not even call me or if he called I did not hear. That night my mind was extremely clear. I was solving square roots and cube roots and imagining the forms of $(a+b)$ $(b+c)$ $(c+a)$. I was even trying to solve the riddle as to in how many ways the nine planets could be placed in the twelve houses. What would be the effect of the rays of the specified colour of specified velocity when they fall on the human mind and so on. Suddenly the scene would change and I would see the Eastern Ghats, the rippling waves of the morning sea, the yellow sands, the sparking rivers, the jumping rivulets, the green trees rocked by the evening breeze, the ruined village, the household, the boys and girls and the mother. This was the scene I suddenly remembered. It was Andhra, No, India. Nay, more. The world itself.

Next morning the doctor came and woke me up.

“How are you, Mr. Acharya” he asked. I opened my eyes but the light was hurting. With a groan I closed again. Screens were placed on both the sides. “You were bad last night,” said the doctor. On another occasion the doctor was again nervous. I was wondering if I would die at all. A strange feeling came on me that if I were to die I must know how I die. I would then feel my pulse. “I must see how I die. Perhaps there would be a thud in the heart, a confusion in the mind and a sort of cracking sensation in the body.” One day the C.C. came with a telegram from Messrs. Bhulabhai Desai, Satyamurthi and Assaf Ali, the Leader, the Deputy Leader and the Secretary of the Congress Party in the Assembly, asking us to give up the hunger-strike. The Government of India issued a communique that they were deeply concerned with the impending deaths owing to the hunger-strike in the Andamans. They hinted that repatriation would be their policy but nothing was mentioned about the classification. On the 11th of August 3 doctors and 3 compounders came over from Calcutta to attend on the hunger-strikers. That very morning the doctor came earlier and told me that some telegram was received from the Madras Government. In the meanwhile the S.M.O. also came to me; “Good morning, Mr. Acharya, I got a telegram for you. The C.C. asked me to take it to you myself. It is from your father, directed by the Premier of Madras.” He then read the telegram to me. “Father requests to take food immediately acting under the directions of the Premier.” I kept silent. “Mr. Acharya, please think over it well. Every question has its two sides. First of all you were not in a fit condition to begin this hunger-strike. But you began and gave an impetus to the

rest. The others are taking water, but you are refusing it. Your condition, I must frankly tell you, is not satisfactory. Now here is the telegram from the Premier—so to say. Please give serious thought to this.” I still kept silent. “What do you propose to say?” asked the S.M.O. “My thanks to Mr. Rajagopalachari but it is an all India question.” “Then what do you say” he asked again. “Nothing in particular. You are a pigeon” cried the S.M.O. in exasperation. “Yes, doctor, rightly so. If not, your position of an S.M.O. might not have been too far, for me. Thank you. I wish the whole of India becomes pigeon-headed for once that it may be free.” “No, No” came down the S.M.O. “Please don’t get upset, Mr. Acharya, you don’t realise how serious your case is.” I was silent. It was not I who was upset.

Was it not Mr. Satyamurthi who first of all drew the attention of the country towards the hunger-strike? Was it not Mr. Rajagopalachari who first demanded his prisoners to be repatriated. Madras or Andhra, Bengal or Punjab, all tend towards the nation. The nations themselves tend towards a closer and harmonious contact by the economical bonds that have spread all over the globe. Mr. Satyamurthi and Mr. Rajagopalachari, Dr. Tagore, and Mahatma Gandhi gave sufficient proof, regarding what a Madrasee is capable of, how the Bengalee could stir the nation and what an Indian can do. There was another telegram sent from the Assembly by Mr. Satyamurthi and others after the adjournment motion was carried in the Assembly. One day the Doctor went into the yard and found one boy Mr. Kesav Samajdar lying unconscious. From the beginning he was of weak constitution and he now grew weaker. He

was brought into the hospital on the arms of the doctor and an injection was given to him immediately. But for this he would not have survived. By this time the number of the hunger-strikers was 235. Most of the rest were on work-strike. About a dozen were not participating in the strike in any form. As usual all the news papers were being given to them. And my friends were getting the news from that source.

Thus were dragging on the weary days. Day by day the ordeal was getting more and more severe. Bijoy Babu was a patient and was in the hospital. He was passing blood. He refused work and also wanted to join the strike which meant certain death to him. With utmost difficulty alone he was restrained. He was in the same corridor in which I was placed and came to see me. Thus for 30 days I was inviting death, defying it, and slowly slipping into its jaws. This is but a simple narration of the facts.

From the 17th of August a tremendous reaction set in. I tried to keep in something, but I was unable to do so; for, in the beginning I was wantonly vomiting out and that in course of time it became a habit and the habit turned into a disease. Bijoy Babu was coming and going, to give me information. One day he was sitting by my side, when I vomited a great lot, and in the vomiting there appeared dark clots of blood. It was taken to the doctor and all were more nervous than ever before. In this way I was vomiting blood every day three or four times. There was a suggestion that there might be an ulceration in the stomach; or was it coming from the heart? Since then I was fed four times a day with mermite and Horlicks or glucose and brandy. There was a gene-

ral rumour that I might be taken to Madras on the 20th of August. I was counting the days again and again. To me going to Madras meant an unconditional release. But again I was told that the ship would be starting on the 30th of that month. Ten days passed away and I was in indescribable despondency. There was a talk that Mr. Mohanlal Sexena was coming over to visit the jail. But on the very morning of the ship's arrival it was learnt that none was coming.

It was the morning of the '28th'. The doctors came and tried to feed me but I for some reason or other got out of sorts and gave a resistance that terribly exhausted me. Immediately afterwards the C.C. and S.M.O. visited the jail. When he came to the hospital the C.C. asked the doctor if I was able to hear. The S.M.O. came near me and said "Mr. Acharya, the C.C. wants to talk to you." But the C.C. asked him to read the telegram to me. It came from Mahatma Gandhi. The S.M.O. sat down on my cot and began to read to this effect. "It will be most graceful on your part if you hear the repeated requests of the country to which I also venture to add my own advice and give up this hunger-strike. It will be of personal benefit to me if you let me know of your views on terrorism. I ask you this, for, some of the detainees tell me that they have no faith in terrorism and I hear the contrary from other quarters." I did not hear it well but when I heard of Gandhiji's name great strength and confidence came to me. "Please read it again" I asked. The S.M.O. read it again and said: "Please give your opinion. All the others are doing so." Then all of them went away. The doctor came again with his feeding apparatus. "Please doctor don't do it," I said. "Why" he asked

me, "I can't keep quiet. You may collapse." "No, doctor, please excuse me. I feel it criminal to resist even after hearing the words of Mahatmaji. Please wait till my friends come to some decision. I cannot go against my heart, yet I cannot break the discipline too." The doctor did not leave me. He said that it would not be possible for him to keep quiet. For that day too I was fed and in the evening when he came I refused him outright. All these days they were giving me four feedings a day and my pulse went down to 30. I heard that a big meeting was going on to discuss what to do. By 9 p.m. they came to a decision and that was immediately carried to all the corners. The doctor came running to me. I was not fed since the evening and my pulse was very weak. He told me with all the anxiety of a mother that they decided to call off the hunger-strike.

I was vomiting violently even after I had broken my fast. Ten days afterwards I was weighed and my weight was 98 lbs. After gaining something I had a loss of 32 pounds during the hunger-strike. I was treated from the beginning. I was kept on whey diet for a week. Then I was given biscuits and curd, and afterwards some fruit. There was a big confusion in the yard. The medical authorities could not manage the diet of 235 patients. It was due to the great kindness of the S.M.O. that the things were managed satisfactorily within the limits of possibility. When I was allowed to meet my friends I was told that Sambamurthy was the Speaker of the Madras Legislative Assembly and I was much taken aback. There were still eight people who would not give up the hunger-strike unless an assurance came from the Government side. But owing to the in-

tervention of Sarat Chandra Bose they too gave it up on 16th September.

The very next morning the Superintendent came to me with a beaming face and said that I would be going away on the 22nd of that month. It took some time for me to believe that I was actually leaving that place of eternal stagnation. I was told that the first batch would consist of 72 prisoners, the prisoners of all the other provinces excluding Bengal. The 21st evening was very trying for me. Many of my friends came to wish me *bon voyage*. It was very hard to leave them. By the very process of criticising I somehow began to like everything that was of Bengal, their culture and genius, their art and poetry, their customs and manners, the theories and philosophies and even their petty quarrels, and over-stressing pronunciation and their chimdimash. It might be this love that made me bold to criticise them in these pages though jokingly. It was at 5 that Sudhin Babu called on me. He was a well-read man in politics and from the beginning kept himself aloof from the local affairs. He advised me to be likewise too, but temperamentally I was otherwise. We wished each other good luck. Afterwards some other friends came along, among whom there was Mr. Bhola-nadh Roy, with his sad eyes and pale face, the very one whom I saw from the quarantine as he was playing in the football ground.

It was rather very hard to face the idea of leaving them. For two years we lived together, suffered together and felt and thought together. "Mr. Acharya, now you are going to Madras and there the Congress is in power. There is every likelihood of your being released. Don't

you think so ? ” Mr. Gope and others asked. I smiled and shook my hand in the negative. It was sweet to imagine that I would be free. “ But you see, it is not so easy,” I said for I knew and remember the special Court and the special Judge. “ But you see, it is the policy of the Congress to release all the Political prisoners in the Congress Provinces, so that they may bring moral pressure on others. Moreover Mr. Rajagopalachary’s Government seems to have taken up a radical programme. The moment you reach Madras you may be released. You see, you are not to be concentrated in one jail. The people belonging to the Punjab are to be sent to Lahore and U. P. people to their Province. Unless there is the question of release how can one Government take charge of prisoners convicted by a different Government ? Who will sanction their budget ? Hence it is certain you are going to be released,” they argued. I smiled again and somehow felt that the release was not so immediately near. “ Then what are you going to do for us ? You perfectly know as you are a party to our talks and our deliberations as regards our political future. We wired to Gandhiji that we had no faith in terrorism not because we anyhow sought our release but because of the objective approach to our analytical thoughts. Now if you are released what are you going to do for us who cannot hope to be released so soon. To the British Government our dialectical change in thought or tactics means nothing. And Mr. Fazul Huq or Sir Sikander Hayat Khan won’t relish the thought of our release so soon.” While I listened to them I thought of my release as the most improper course and felt guilty. “ I don’t think I will be released so soon. But if it is to be so, my only duty will be to proclaim

through the press and platform our dialectical change and demonstrate that we have no faith in terrorism." I was then lying in bed hardly able to walk a few steps. "Yes, till all of us are released I tell you this would be my only work. Moreover how can the others go on with any serious idea of politics when hundreds of us are inside the jail?" "But if you can tell our views to the leaders, we think there are better chances of mutual understanding." And the British Government too will realise what we are." I promised them from my sick-bed that I would do all in my power in the direction they indicated.

Mr. Radhavallab Gope laid his hand on my chest. I clasped it eagerly and held it till the very moment of my departure.

That night I hardly slept. All my life in the Andamans appeared before my vision. There were many reasons to feel sorry and dejected, and pessimistic. Yet that life taught me to be calm and calculative, pushing and assertive; and I paid my bitter thanks to the cruel pedagogue.

The next morning found me on the deck of the Maharaja, that was waiting to take me to my country which I had little expected to see again.

